

ESSAYS IN REFORM ON THE EVE OF REVOLUTION

THE ACADEMY OF CHALONS-SUR-MARNE

1776-1789

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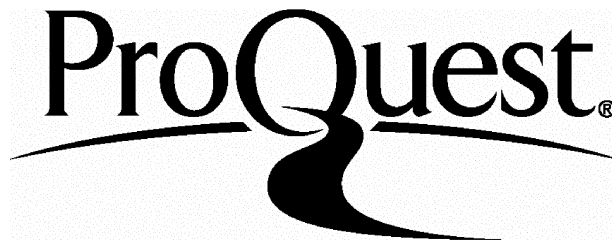
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Essays in Reform on the Eve of Revolution
The Academy of Châlons-sur-Marne, 1776-1789

This thesis recounts the history of the Academy of Châlons-sur-Marne and its use of its privilege as a royal academy to hold essay contests to promote public discussion of France's social and economic structures and the Crown's recent attempts to reform them. A study of the public and private activities of the Academy, it grants insight into the revolutionary education of both the academicians and their public. It seeks to understand the process whereby those without legitimate political voice considered themselves summoned by this academy to express their views and then analyzes the texts which were for many a first written formulation of political opinion. It surveys the Academy's success in attracting public interest in its competitions and shows how this proved prejudicial to its survival and that of the reforms its essay contests had been designed to support.

The Châlons contests provoked essays from across the social and geographic spectrum. They constitute a significant sample of literate opinion on the eve of the Revolution and provide, along with the Academy's correspondence with Crown ministers, 14,000 pages of primary source material for this study. Chapter one sets the context with an overview of French academies and the Crown's intentions in founding them. Chapter two surveys the Châlons Academy's history and its relationship to the movement for reform. Chapter three profiles its essay competitors; chapters four and five analyze its competition essays on the begging and labouring poor. Chapter six summarizes the reception given its contests by the public and government and considers their response to the questions announced after the first contest. Chapter seven recounts the government's censorship of the Academy's activities and the response it evoked. The thesis concludes with an assessment of the influence of the Châlons Academy and its competitions on the events of the Revolution.

Janis Spurlock

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Note on Quotations from Eighteenth-Century Sources

Citations from the previously unpublished eighteenth-century sources used in this thesis retain the original spelling, accents and punctuation of the men and women who wrote them in order that twentieth-century readers may themselves judge not only the content but also the different levels of literary sophistication present in this material. Although the Crown through the Académie Française had been endeavouring for more than a century to provide polite society with a standardized orthography and guide to acceptable literary usage through publication of the Academy's Dictionnaire, the men and women submitting their views to the minor provincial academy at Châlons-sur-Marne were very often a world apart from those whose designs for the French language had made them arbiters of acceptability in the Paris Academy. The original orthography of the Châlons sources is, therefore, retained in the hope that modern readers of their views may enter more easily into the mental universe of largely non-professional writers for whom the essays submitted to the public competitions of the Châlons Academy may have been their only public literary endeavour.

Pour y reussir je n'ay pas été puiser dan les anciens ce qu'ils ont put écrire sur cette matière, je n'ay pas été feuilleter nos auteurs modernes pour y decouvrir des lumieres sur cet objet important, je me suis renfermé dans l'examen de nos moeurs, des differents ressorts qui ordinairement nous determinent. je n'ai donc pas paré ce discours des richesses d'une vaste érudition, des ornement de l'Eloquence, j'aurois cru m'ecarter et m'eloigner du but; mon tems, d'ailleurs, n'est pas assez à ma disposition pour en distraire cette portion que demanderoit des recherches, cette noblesse et cette beauté dans le langage qui charme et ravit le lecteur. une simple et courte exposition de mon sujet sera tout le merite de mes foibles essais; je n'ay voulu que me rendre utile à ma patrie: puisse je avoir reussi.

M le curé de la paroisse
de St Jean de Châlons

INTRODUCTION

Each year between 1776 and 1789 Parisian, provincial and foreign journals carried advertisements placed by the Académie des Sciences, arts, et belles lettres of Châlons-sur-Marne, France, to announce the subject of its annual prize essay competition. The announcements usually appeared in early September, shortly after the Academy's annual public meeting held on the feast day of St Louis, 25 August, and included a short résumé of the Academy's work for the year. They gave details of the specific question to be treated for the forthcoming year's contest and an explanation of the social, economic or political context in which the question had been conceived, for this academy openly expressed its intent to allow members of the public to offer their views about reform subjects made topical by recent government initiatives. The Academy's competitions were open to all and potential contestants were advised that their essays, which could be written in French or Latin, were to reach the Academy by July of the year following the announcement. Essays were to be submitted with no identification on the essay itself since the Châlons academicians were committed to the principle that in a true Republic of Letters the views of enlightened men and women should be judged on the basis of merit alone; the competitor's name, address and any other identifying material were to be written on a separate document which would repeat the devise given on the competition essay. The Academy in its announcements also advised potential competitors that it was interested not in theoretical treatises but in essays which contained information and ideas that were practical and useful.

The Châlons Academy was only one of thirty-two provincial academies in France which, in the decade before the Revolution, were holding public essay competitions and offering prize money and publication for the best essay or essays submitted to them by members of the general public. However, with few exceptions these other academies, both in their private and public functions, were concerned with essentially literary or scientific matters that reflected the secure positions their members enjoyed within the social hierarchy and their tacit agreement with the Crown that everything that had to do with the social, economic and judicial administration of the country was not a matter for 'academic' discussion.

The Châlons Academy, which had only just received its letters-patent from Louis XVI in August of 1775, rapidly distinguished itself from these academies in the public eye by its open consideration of many of the most intractable economic and social problems besetting both ordinary Frenchmen and those whose responsibility it was to govern them. It asked questions about the rising number of poor in France's towns and countryside and about what the State's responsibility to them was; it sought the views of the public on taxes such as the corvée and on other matters which raised questions about the distribution and administration of the country's fiscal burdens; it focused attention on injustices and inequities in France's system of civil and criminal justice and raised, too, the issue of the people's right to basic education. The questions posed the public by the Châlons Academy, unlikely topics for consideration by a royal academy, nevertheless seem to reflect its members' genuine and practical concern for the problems faced by ordinary Frenchmen as well as an equally genuine belief that if men of good will worked together to find solutions to these problems then the Crown would be willing and able to respond with reforms that would repair and recondition a French social fabric which, despite

their optimism, the Châlons academicians saw as potentially torn by hostility and division.

The public's response to the Châlons competitions demonstrated just how accurately this fledgling provincial academy had assessed both the private concerns and the reformist optimism of the literate public outside the academies. But the Crown's response to its competitions demonstrated just how naïve both the Châlons academicians and their public essay competitors were about the Crown's willingness or ability to entertain public discussion of such highly-charged political issues, even when this was done by those who believed they were submitting their views to Louis XVI through a royal academy and in so doing openly professing their commitment to serve Crown and country.

For the few years that the Châlons Academy was allowed by the government to operate without censorship, it managed to act as a determinedly open forum where members of the literate public could express their views. During this time, the Academy received essays from Frenchmen writing from nearly two-thirds of France's present-day départements as well as from competitors living as far away as Spain, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, Berlin and St Petersburg. And, despite the passage of well over two hundred years and the ravages of ministerial censors at the time, more than eleven thousand pages of manuscript essays have survived from these competitions. To the manuscript sources have now been added an additional three thousand pages of printed texts -- published versions of essays written for the Academy's competitions but then either confiscated by the Crown or withdrawn by anxious competitors who then published them anonymously or abroad in the years following the Châlons Academy's contests. The manuscripts in Châlons were, in accordance with the Academy's competition rules, submitted without an identifying name; but the

Academy in judging the essays and subsequent archivists in cataloguing them matched essay and devise and in so doing identified a number of the contest competitors. Yet a large number of the manuscripts remained unattributed, archived without the accompanying devise which might have disclosed who their authors had been. The first task of this present project was therefore to complete the work of identification by using all the dossiers of correspondence received by the Academy during this period. This process yielded valuable information which made it possible to identify a much larger number of the Châlons essayists, so that now as many as three-quarters of the competitors in the Academy's major contests can be designated by name, occupation and/or geographic origin. Drawing on the Academy's correspondence and relying on the generous help of a network of archivists and librarians in Paris and the provinces it was also possible to locate not only additional essays but to discover something of the social, occupational and, at times, even the economic background of their authors.

Although they came from different regions and from different social categories, the essayists in the Châlons competitions seem nevertheless to have shared a common conviction that it was possible to improve the lot of the ordinary Frenchman and the belief that Frenchmen like themselves could contribute to the wave of public support for fundamental reforms in their society by writing essays like theirs for the Châlons Academy. Nearly all of the Academy's competition essayists appear to have been firm advocates of monarchical government; yet their faith in Louis XVI and in the Crown's power and will to effect reform seem to have been devoid of any suspicion that the introduction of the social, economic and institutional changes which they advocated through their essays might ultimately undermine the whole basis of the French monarchy as then constituted. And when the

Revolution ushered in some of the very reforms the essayists had suggested as if with one voice, it also revealed differences between them which had perhaps been less clear in their early days as amateur political commentators. So, out of these would-be reformers the Revolution made royalists and émigrés, local, regional and even national political leaders.

Among the Châlons competitors were men whose names are familiar to the historian, men like Brissot de Warville and Petion de Villeneuve, Boncerf, Choderlos de Laclos, Guyton de Morveau, Letrosne, Mathon de la Cour, Panckoucke and the abbé Montlinot, all of whom would play minor or major roles on the national scene in the early years of the Revolution or those just preceding it. But among their fellow competitors in the Châlons contests were hundreds of others whose names have long been forgotten but who had been brought, by their ordinary activities as doctors or parish priests, petty administrators or traders, lawyers or laboueurs or religious serving in hospice or poor house, into close if not daily contact with ordinary Frenchmen and who had recognized in them an increasing inability, or perhaps just an unwillingness, either to bear the brunt of society's fiscal and economic burdens or to be excluded indefinitely from the enjoyment of at least some of what life in society was meant to afford. Literate and contributing actively to social, economic and professional life in their towns or villages, these essayists had ample opportunity to observe those both above and below them in the society around them and this contact seems to have affected profoundly not only their attitude toward France's labouring poor but also their view of those who were prospering under the current social system. That a royal academy was, through its public essay contests, soliciting their advice and opinions seems to have persuaded these unpractised publicists that they had a role, however minor, to play in influencing government policy and reforms. Speaking their minds

through their Châlons essays they acted on the conviction that their practical knowledge of the effect of France's law and institutions, its taxes and its economic policies -- and the ways in which these were being administered and perceived at the local level by ordinary people -- might help the young Louis XVI and his ministers in the great movement toward reform which they believed the Crown was undertaking to make France a better and a more just place for all its people.

The questions posed by the Châlons Academy provided these Frenchmen with a public forum for the expression of their private concerns about problems familiar to anyone who lived and worked alongside that part of the nation who by its labour supported the rest of French society or who by their lack of it threatened the social weal. The sympathetic manner in which the Châlons academicians had worded their questions succeeded in persuading hundreds of competitors who seem to have entered no other academic competition that the public arena being offered by the annual essay contests of this academy was one that they were most welcome to enter.

Opening its first essay contest in 1776 with a question on the plight of the mendiant (both the criminal beggar and the honest but absolutely indigent one), the Academy received at least 126 separate essays -- easily the largest response to any public essay competition held by any French academy in the eighteenth century. Although subsequent contest topics did not arouse quite such an enormous public response, they nevertheless stimulated an exceptionally large and broadly-based cross-section of the literate population to send the Academy some sort of written reply, even if this were only a scant, and badly-written page. For year after year this provincial academy, with unique persistence, announced public essay questions which betrayed a perceptibly popular focus and which seemed to

call for replies grounded at least as much if not more in practical experience and observation than in the erudition or elegance called for by the essay contests of other royal academies. In 1782 and 1783 the Châlons Academy asked the public what it thought could be done to improve the living conditions of laboureurs, journaliers, gens de peine and their families. This question opened up a whole range of topics from how and if the grain and labour markets should be controlled, to taxation and tenancy and the plight of those seasonally or permanently without sufficient land or work. These were subjects about which ordinary Frenchmen held strong views and the essays the Academy received for this competition, when read alongside the essays written for the Academy's first contest on the plight of the begging poor, allow us to piece together a remarkable picture of the attitudes of their authors towards the working population and the burdens under which they laboured. Other contest questions -- all of which retained the Academy's peculiarly popular bias -- on reform of the corvée (1778 and 1779), public education (1779 and 1781), civil and criminal laws and practices (1780, 1781 and 1782) and on reforms in the administration and collection of taxes (1780) -- provided further opportunity for Frenchmen preoccupied with questions of social injustice to speak out for reform and in criticism of laws and institutions and administrative, economic and fiscal structures as well as to question accepted social conventions and practices. The essays written for these competitions -- and for those that were submitted in answer to the more specific and localized economic questions posed in the period after the government had attempted to muzzle the Châlons Academy -- provide us with a rare opportunity to listen in as people from a part of France that was still officially without political voice tried to give expression to their own anxieties and aspirations and to those of many of their fellows.

The present study will treat the essays in reform of both the Châlons academicians and their essay competitors in the following order. Part One will provide the institutional, cultural, political and provincial context of the Châlons Academy and its competition questions. Part Two will present a profile of its competing public. Part Three will attempt to summarize the ideas contained in their essays, focusing particularly on the essays written for the two competitions on the begging and labouring poor, and to convey something of their tone and message by letting the most convincing, if not always the most well-spoken, of the essayists speak through their contest essays. And, the last section of this study, Part Four, will recount what happened to the Academy and its members, its essay competitors and the reforms which they had advocated both in the immediate aftermath of the contests and then in the period that followed when the government attempted to silence their reformist voices. Finally, the ideas which emerged from these competitions will be briefly considered in the light of revolutionary events, when an even larger public was allowed to enter the debate about the direction which French society and its government should be taking.

However, to understand fully the significance of both the Châlons Academy's questions and the public's response to them, our study must first be set in the general context of the social, economic and administrative culture in which the academies of Old Regime France flourished. This context will enable us to assess the ambitions, the anxieties, and, ultimately, the hidden agenda of the minor provincial academicians at Châlons whose annual essay competitions, early in the reign of Louis XVI, provided literate Frenchmen with such an extraordinary public forum in which to express their essays in reform.

PART ONE

THE CROWN AND THE ACADEMY:
CULTURAL CONTROL AND SOCIAL CHANGE

I

THE ROYAL ACADEMY:

INSTITUTIONAL, INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

In the France of Louis XVI a local learned society was granted royal recognition as an academy only after government officials and ministers were completely satisfied that the aims and activities and the loyalty to the Crown of those petitioning for the privilege of a public corporate existence were -- and always had been -- totally above suspicion. If unsuspect, the society was then brought into legal existence by letters-patent emanating directly from the Crown which were then stamped by the Keeper of the Seals and countersigned by a Secretary of State before registration by the Paris Parlement.

The aspirant academicians from Châlons had first begun petitioning government ministers for recognition as an academy within only months of their earliest, informal meetings as a literary society, mid-way through the reign of Louis XV. The Châlons society would not achieve its goal for nearly a quarter of a century; but the procedure which ministers in the early 1750s advised them to follow if they wanted to become an academy was already more than a century old by the time it was recommended to them, for it was under Louis XIII that the Crown first set about institutionalizing culture in order to mobilize men of letters into the service of the State.

THE PARIS AND PROVINCIAL ACADEMIES AND THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF CULTURE

Like the literary society that began meeting in Châlons 120 years later, the Académie Française had begun as a purely private assembly of a dozen

or so friends gathering together weekly in Paris to exchange news and views and read and discuss their own latest literary offerings.¹ Strictly speaking their assemblies, like all unauthorized assemblies under the Old Regime, were illegal and, with Huguenots and writers whose princely patrons had already fallen victim to Louis XIII's powerful prime minister among their number, the members of this particular private literary club had even more reason to shroud their meetings in public silence. Almost inevitably, given Richelieu's active network of informers, the Cardinal learned of their society and responded swiftly making them an offer they dared not refuse.² Fearing the meetings of these writers and friends as much as he feared the salons with their private patronage and threat of political intrigue, Richelieu invited them to formalize their assemblies and membership and constitute themselves a royal academy, indicating that under his patronage their society would be given legal and corporate existence,

¹ On the early history of the Académie Française see the article by the Duc de La Force, 'La Fondation de l'Académie Française' in Trois siècles de l'Académie Française par les Quarante (Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1935), pp. 1-21, which quotes extensively from the original edition of the academy's first history written by Paul Pellisson, Relation contenant l'histoire de l'Académie Française (Paris, Augustin Courbé, 1653). See, too, Jean-Pol Caput, L'Académie Française, Que sais-je? (Paris, PUF, 1986); the Duc de Castries, La Vieille Dame du Quai Conti: Une histoire de l'Académie Française (Paris, Perrin, 1978) and David Maland, Culture and Society in Seventeenth Century France (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970).

² At first some of the habitués of the society dared in private to argue resistance to Richelieu; but the poet Chapelain persuaded the friends it would be imprudent to disdain the Cardinal's offer, arguing the case in terms that left them in no doubt as to Richelieu's power over them: 'Vous avez affaire à un homme qui ne veut pas médiocrement ce qu'il veut et qui n'a pas accoutumé de trouver de la résistance ou de la souffrir impunément. Il tiendra à injure le mépris qu'on ferait de sa protection et s'en pourrait ressentir contre chaque particulier. Du moins, puisque, par les lois du Royaume toutes sortes d'assemblées qui se font sans autorité du Prince sont défendues, pour peu que le cardinal en ait envie, il lui sera fort aisé de faire, malgré vous-mêmes, cesser les vôtres et de rompre par ce moyen une société que chacun de vous croyait éternelle.' The quotation is taken from Pellisson's Relation contenant l'histoire de l'Académie, quoted by the Duc de la Force, 'La Fondation', p. 9.

its members privileges and official duties, with the whole of their activities authorized by letters-patent which would be registered by the Parlement of Paris.

Once known to the powerful prime minister, the meetings of these men of letters could only continue under the terms and conditions he set them and these were both clear and strict. The Academy was to work for the glorification of French language and culture and so to spread the influence of France's king. But, in the delicate balancing and counterbalancing of power which was forever a feature of 'absolute' monarchy in France, it was necessary for Richelieu to gain parliamentary approval for the new royal academy and this was approval not easily obtained. Just as he had feared the savants' meetings as a potential source of political intrigue, so the Parlement of Paris feared that Louis XIII's prime minister would -- by making the members of the new academy wholly dependent on the Crown for their privileges and position -- create a new power base from which the Crown would attempt to usurp some of Parlement's authority and jurisdiction. For three years Parlement resisted royal instructions and eventually registered the letters-patent of the Académie Française only after Louis XIII had forced registration of the edicts with a lettre de cachet and Richelieu had agreed a clause limiting the Academy's activities to strictly literary matters.³ The letters-patent of the new royal academy, like those of all subsequent French academies, set forth rules and statutes which regulated the number and character of its members, fixed both a designated meeting place and day, and laid down carefully prescribed cultural duties.

³ Although the first formal meeting of the Académie Française took place in 1634, the letters patent were not registered by the Parlement of Paris until 1637. For an account of the three-year struggle between Richelieu and the Parlement see the Duc de Castries, La Vieille Dame du Quai Conti, pp. 135-36 and Maland, Culture and Society, p. 99.

But Richelieu had won. In bringing the Académie Française into existence he had at once both eliminated a potential source of political criticism and gained the service of savants who would, on his instructions, work to make French 'pure, éloquente et capable de traiter tous les arts et toutes les sciences' and thus enable the language of France's king to 'succéder à la latine comme la latine à la greque' as the language of civilization.⁴ The men Richelieu brought into Crown service would write his speeches and polemical tracts and, even more importantly, they would reach and influence a larger public with their publications and thus make known 'les grandes et mémorables actions du Roi' among as many of Louis's subjects as were 'capable[s] de lire'.⁵ In creating this first academy and gaining for it recognition as an official corporation with the State, Richelieu had also laid the cornerstone of an intellectual and cultural establishment which would serve the monarchy's purposes for the next century and a half. From within this establishment savants who under the monarchy's strict regime of censorship would otherwise have had little

⁴ The quotations are taken from Article 24 of the Academy's letters-patent and from the prospectus of the Academy's work presented to Richelieu by a deputation from the Academy in 1634. See Gabriel Hanotaux, 'L'Esprit de l'Académie' in Trois siècles, p. 24, and the Duc de la Force, 'La Fondation', p. 15. As David Maland notes, the Crown's wish in this matter became reality a century later when the Berlin Academy of Science and Literature, one of whose founders was Samuel Formey who would be an honorary member of the eighteenth-century Châlons Academy, announced that it was abandoning Latin for French: 'We have substituted French for Latin in order to extend the usefulness of our Mémoires; for the boundaries of the empire of Latin are visibly receding, while the French language now occupies the place that Greek occupied at the time of Cicero -- everyone learns it.' Maland, Culture and Society, p. 100.

⁵ The words are taken from Pellisson's account of the speech made by Boisrobert to Richelieu in 1634 summarizing the activities the Academy proposed to undertake under the Cardinal's patronage. See the Duc de la Force, 'La Formation', p. 15.

access to publication,⁶ or without its patronage of the arts and sciences virtually no access to sufficient research funds, became an integral part of the Crown's mobilization of writers, artists, scientists and scholars into the service of absolutism.

The process begun by Richelieu was elaborated and extended by Colbert and Louis XIV. In the 1660s Colbert, who was a member of the Académie Française, and his king built upon Richelieu's foundations, creating two more royal academies in Paris and making the relationship between sovereign and savant still more formal and explicit. Louis XIV himself became the protector of the Académie Française and moved its meetings to his residence in the Louvre. Colbert, who believed that the Dictionnaire which the academicians were supposed to be assembling would, when completed, become the embodiment literally of French culture, increased the number of hours and days his academic colleagues were to work on it; and, echoing Richelieu's complaint that 'l'Académie ne fait rien utile pour le public',⁷ Colbert imposed much stricter supervision on its members. He required the Academy's permanent secretary to record its private and public proceedings in leather-bound registers which were to include the names of all those present at each meeting (and the time they arrived) and these registers were henceforth to be subject to regular royal scrutiny.⁸ And Colbert's efforts to impose principles of efficiency and

⁶ Daniel Roche reminds us that at the time the Parisian academies were being incorporated, the Crown through Richelieu and Chancellor Séguier was also elaborating the system by which it would censor and control the printed word. Les Républicains des lettres: Gens de culture et Lumières au XVIIIe siècle (Paris, Fayard, 1988), p. 159.

⁷ Caput, L'Académie Française, p. 95.

⁸ The Duc de Castries, La Vieille Dame du Quai Conti, p. 153-55. Colbert had special silver 'jetons' minted to reward academicians daily assiduous in their work for the academy and its Dictionnaire and furnished their meeting room in the Louvre with a pendulum clock so that the academy's permanent secretary could accurately record when a member had

productivity on the Académie Française were extended to the two new Paris academies as well, for the King and his minister were convinced that all the royal academies could serve, if carefully and strictly administered, as an important weapon in the monarchy's campaign to extend its dominance both culturally and economically within France and outside its borders, too.

In 1663 Colbert initiated the meetings of a group soon known as the 'petite académie', men selected to serve as 'les trompettes des vertus du roi' under royal orchestration. Meeting together weekly in Colbert's house, these writers and historians were instructed to serve their king both by writing authorized histories to chronicle Louis XIV's achievements and conquests and by commissioning medals and monuments that would provide the public with visual reminders of his greatness. When received in audience before the King, the members of the 'petite académie' were charged with an explicitly political role crucial to their monarch's heart. 'Messieurs,' Louis XIV is said to have intoned, 'je vous confie la chose du monde qui m'est la plus précieuse, qui est ma gloire. Je suis sûr que vous ferez des merveilles.'⁹ It was Colbert's task to coordinate the concrete expression of this glory and in commissioning the construction of equestrian statues, triumphal arches, obelisks and pyramids, his 'petite académie' worked with his crude dictum in mind: 'It is by the size of their monuments that kings are measured'.¹⁰ And in 1696 his 'petite

arrived and therefore if he had earned the 'jeton'.

⁹ Quoted by Orest Ranum in Artisans of Glory: Writers and Historical Thought in Seventeenth-Century France (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1980), p. 179.

¹⁰ Quoted in English by Maland in Culture and Society, pp. 244-45. The most recent and lavishly illustrated study of Louis's policy of self-glorification is by Peter Burke, The Fabrication of Louis XIV (New Haven - London, Yale University Press, 1992).

académie' became the Académie Royale des Médailles et Inscriptions, officially institutionalizing royal patronage of yet another of the arts.¹¹

Meanwhile the Crown had also begun to invite professional scientists, both French and foreign, to take up residence in Paris as members of a royal Academy of Sciences. The science academy, which met in the Bibliothèque du Roi, received its letters-patent in 1666 and by them its scientist members were instructed to 'work for the perfection of the sciences and arts and to seek generally for all that can be of use or convenience to the human race and particularly to France'.¹² Committing extremely large sums to finance major new scientific installations in Paris (like the Observatoire) and offering generous funds for pensions and research, the Crown attracted essentially professional scientists to form an international body of experts employed to execute Louis's colonial and mercantilist grand designs in the face of foreign (essentially English, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese) competition. The Crown commissioned extensive foreign expeditions whose explorers and scientists provided information which, coordinated with data gathered by the academicians-astronomers who had established the new Paris Observatoire, produced a

¹¹ For an account of the Crown's attempts to control the membership and activities of this body see Richard Waller, 'The Académie des Inscriptions in 1705: A Year in the Life of a Learned Institution', pp. 299-315 in Enlightenment Essays in Memory of Robert Shackleton, ed. G. Barber and C.P. Courtney (Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1988).

¹² Quoted in English by Maland in Culture and Society, p. 245. This brief account of the early history of the Academy of Sciences is drawn largely from the work of Roger Hahn and Alice Stroup. In addition to Hahn's major study, The Anatomy of a Scientific Institution: The Paris Academy of Sciences, 1666-1803 (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London, University of California Press, 1971) see in particular the chapters contributed by Hahn, 'Louis XIV and Science Policy', pp. 195-206, and Stroup, 'Louis XIV as Patron of the Parisian Academy of Sciences', pp. 221-40, to David Lee Rubin's Sun King: The Ascendancy of French Culture during the Reign of Louis XIV, Folger Books (London - Toronto, Associated University Presses; Washington, Folger Shakespeare Library, 1992).

detailed world map that was a significant contribution to knowledge and an important navigational aid to France's commercial and colonial expansion. Members of the Academy of Science were given a significant role as technical advisers to the Crown, undertaking surveys within France, drawing up detailed maps of existing provinces and of territory recently acquired for the Crown, and also gathering useful information about weather conditions and natural and human resources.¹³ Academicians, one third of whom were medical practitioners, were detailed to work to improve medicine and public health, while still other members undertook the task of examining a whole range of inventions and machines designed to improve French agricultural and manufacturing techniques and production which were submitted to the academy for its approval. Those machines and methodologies given the approval of the Academy of Sciences were then promoted by the Crown, with models constructed and instructions circulated in the provinces and subsidies awarded to those seeking to develop and implement them. The Crown relied heavily on its science academicians for this practical technical advice and in 1699 formally charged the Academy of Sciences with the examination of all inventions and machines for which a royal privilege was being sought.

The members of the Academy of Sciences, whether French or foreign, were expected to converse in meetings and to publish their findings in French so that this academy, too, like the Académie Française, was destined to play a significant role in promoting a specifically French and, in this

¹³ A perhaps curious but nevertheless wonderfully convincing illustration of the seriousness and usefulness of the Science Academy's cartographical contribution is offered by Roger Hahn. According to him, the data compiled by Louis XIV's academician scientists in their mapping of France's northern coastlines in the seventeenth century was so reliable that it was still being used in the planning of the D-Day invasions two hundred and fifty years later. Hahn, 'Louis XIV and Science Policy', p. 202.

instance, scientific culture. And in the process, it was also expected to play its part in enhancing Louis's reputation as the most significant European patron of the arts and sciences.¹⁴

It was clear from all Louis XIV's dealing with his royal academies that he intended their members to see themselves as servants of the Crown, independent of any other loyalty, and paid to foster the monarchy's interests and demonstrate unquestioning respect for the laws and institutions which made up the society of orders.¹⁵ When deciding who was to receive pensions, Louis employed an adviser who recommended that he avoid 'those who frequent the court and foster cabals' and chose his academicians among those single-minded in the pursuit of knowledge.¹⁶ The Crown retained the right to approve or disapprove candidates in the royal academies and when sitting academicians recommended a new member of whom Louis XIV did not approve, the King intervened actively in the decision-making process, acting on the basis of the statute, first imposed

¹⁴ See Burke, The Fabrication of Louis XIV, pp. 50-51 for information about the other new academic foundations of this reign: the Académie de Danse (1661), the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture (founded in 1648 but reorganized in 1663); the Académie Française de Rome (1666); the Académie d'Architecture (1671); the Académie Royale de Musique (1672). Clearly it was Louis's aim to marshal all the arts and sciences in service to the French Crown.

¹⁵ That academicians at least publicly accepted this service is clear from the earliest foundations of the Académie Française. In the formal statement of the object of its association made by the Academy to Richelieu, it left no doubt as to where the academicians' allegiances lay: 'L'Académie s'en remet à son fondateur et à son autorité qui, seule ayant donné la forme à cette institution, la peut élever sur des fondements assez forts pour durer autant que la Monarchie.' Pellisson, in the Duc de la Force, 'La Fondation', p. 20. As we shall see, the Châlons Academy was to make a similar acknowledgement to its protector, the Intendant Rouillé d'Orfeuil.

¹⁶ The advice, part of a longer argument that the Crown should choose only professional scientists for its new Academy of Sciences, came in a note from Jean Chapelain to Louis's minister Colbert, which is quoted in English by Erica Harth in Ideology and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France (Ithaca -London, Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 231.

upon the Académie Française but then incorporated into the statutes of the other academies, which stipulated that 'personne ne sera reçu dans l'Académie qui ne soit agréable à Monsieur le protecteur et qui ne soit de bonnes moeurs, de bonne réputation, de bon esprit'.¹⁷ Equally significantly, when the views expressed by academicians displeased him, something which occurred, for example, when the permanent secretary of the Académie Française Mézèrai dared in one of his publications to question the legitimacy of taxes like the taille and gabelle and to criticize the 'tricks' used by French Kings to assess and collect such taxes, the offending member was instantly informed 'que le Roi ne luy avoit pas donné une pension de 4,000 livres pour écrire avec si peu de retenue' nor 'la licence de réfléchir sans nécessité [...] sur une politique établie depuis longtemps, et confirmée par les suffrages de toute la nation'.¹⁸ Clearly there were topics, particularly those related to taxation and administration, which were not considered suitable for 'academic' discussion.

When creating its royal academies the Crown laid down strict rules about what legitimately could be discussed within them and these regulations, common to all the academies, were to prevail throughout the whole of the century and a half that the royal academies were allowed to function. They were first set forth in the statutes of the Académie Française but then were incorporated almost verbatim into the regulations

¹⁷ Quoted by Roche in Les Républicains des lettres, p. 162. Although in principle the Crown made appointments to membership in the Academy on the basis of recommendations of its members, in practice the king did not always approve the Academy's suggestions. Louis XV and Louis XVI both brought pressure to bear on their royal societies, intervening in elections to the Academy of Sciences in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. See Hahn, Anatomy of a Scientific Institution, pp. 80-82.

¹⁸ For a full account of the relationship between Louis XIV and this wayward academician see chapter 7, 'Mézèrai: A Libertin Historiographer', of Orest Ranum's Artisans of Glory, pp. 197-232.

of all subsequent royal academies. Regulations 21, 22 and 23 of the French Academy stipulated that:

(21) 'Il ne sera mis en délibération aucune matière concernant la religion'

(22) 'Les matières morales et politiques ne seront traitées dans l'académie que conformément à l'autorité du prince, à l'état du gouvernement et aux lois du royaume' and

(23) 'L'on prendra garde qu'il ne soit employé dans les ouvrages qui seront publiés, sous le nom de l'Académie ou d'un particulier en qualité d'académicien, aucun terme libertin ou licencieux et qui puisse être équivoque ou mal interprété'.¹⁹

If men of letters were to become academicians and enjoy the Crown's protection and privileges and have access to publication and funding, on entering the academies they had to agree formally to these conditions; constrained by privilege and position as the King's men they were to honour the monarchy, submit to its laws and respect the Church.

In return for their formal agreement to abide by the restrictions the Crown placed upon their activities, academicians were given important privileges, not the least of which was the granting of the right to publish works written by individuals within the academies which had been read in private meetings and formally approved by the body of members. The royal academies were also allowed to offer annual or bi-annual prizes to those savants outside the corporate body who had distinguished themselves in the academies' essay competitions with works which treated the specific topics set for discussion by the assembled academicians. Eventually the academies' printing privilege was to extend beyond the academicians own works to the publication of the winning prize essays themselves, which,

¹⁹ See 'Statuts et règlements donnés à l'Académie Française par le Cardinal de Richelieu' in Choix de Discours de Réception à l'Académie Française depuis son établissement jusqu'à sa suppression, ed. L. Boudou (Paris, Demonville, 1808), II, 524-531 (pp. 526-27) and discussed by Daniel Roche, Le Siècle des lumières en province: Académies et académiciens provinciaux, 1680-1789, 2 vols (Paris et La Haye, Mouton, 1978), I, 102.

like the former, were to be published without recourse to the usual mechanisms of censorship.²⁰

This was the institutional, political and cultural heritage of the provincial academies which were created in the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI in the eighteenth century. Like the academies created by Louis XIII and Louis XIV in the previous century, academic societies in the provinces normally began life as informal meetings of local men of letters who, because of the Old Regime's prohibition against unauthorized assemblies, were constrained to seek royal approval for their gatherings. Usually with the blessing of the provincial Intendant, the local savants would draw up a list of the literary or scientific contributions of their members which they would submit to government ministers along with letters from their Intendant which vouchsafed both the members' loyalty to Church and State and the steadfastness of their contribution to the life of the province. The literary society would then be given letters-patent and statutes and regulations which assigned the new academicians a meeting place, day and time and instructed them to produce works that would be useful to the province. They were in all matters to respect Church and State and to

²⁰ For an excellent discussion of the significance of the Crown's grant to the academies of the exclusive privilege to have works of its members -- and the winners in its prize essay contests -- printed without obtaining the approval of the royal censors and the influence this increasingly gave them, particularly the Academy of Science, throughout the eighteenth century see chapter 3, 'Integration into the Old Regime', pp. 58-83 in Hahn, The Anatomy of a Scientific Revolution.

Academicians also enjoyed fiscal and judicial privileges heretofore granted only to certain members of the first two estates: for example, the right to committimus (the right to receive judgement in a Paris court no matter what the jurisdiction in which a case had been brought), exemption from the taille and from guets et gardes. And to these privileges, granted to members of the Académie Française by Louis XIII under their original letters-patent, Louis XIV in 1668 granted them the privilege of being admitted into his presence on equal footing with the members of the superior courts on all occasions where eloquence held sway. See Édouard Estaunié, 'L'Académie Française et les académies de province', in Trois siècles, p. 432 and the Duc de Castries, La Vielle Dame, p. 152.

produce nothing which might offend public morals. The letters-patent also informed the academicians that as a body they would henceforth enjoy all the privileges of the Crown's academies in Paris.

THE SOCIAL PROFILE AND ROLE OF THE ROYAL ACADEMICIAN

With this picture in mind of the pattern of activities undertaken by the royal academies established in the seventeenth century -- and replicated in the provincial academies established under the tutelage of Louis XV and Louis XVI in the eighteenth century -- it will be useful briefly to consider a profile of the academician's social and professional background. As we have seen, academicians were to be loyal to the Crown, assiduous in service, oriented towards work of practical benefit to the Crown, and careful to observe the conventions implied by their status as the King's men. They were also to participate in a more subtle assault upon the society of orders by accommodating within their membership men of talent from whatever estate.

The Academy of Sciences, perhaps more than the other two main Paris academies, led the way in terms of opening the social recognition of intellectual merit to men from the Third Estate. Most of its original members came from the Third Estate and, in addition to pensions that averaged 1500 livres per year, those from the Third Estate alone were provided lodgings at Crown expense as well. Yet, as time wore on the percentage of academicians from the Third Estate even in the Academy of Sciences declined, while the percentage of noble academicians increased.²¹

²¹ On the alliance between Crown and Third Estate in the Academy of Science in the seventeenth century see Stroup, 'Louis XIV as Patron' p. 229. See James E. McClellan III, 'The Académie Royale des Sciences, 1699-1793: A Statistical Portrait', *Isis*, 72(1981) 541-67, also cited by Stroup, on the rise of noble academicians in the eighteenth century.

Indeed, until near the end of Louis XV's reign both the academies in Paris and those in the provinces were dominated by ecclesiastics or nobles whose own position in society was intimately tied to a defence of the society of orders over which Louis presided. Taking all categories of academic membership -- ordinary, honorary and corresponding²² -- for the thirty-two provincial academies he included in his major study of that milieu, Daniel Roche calculated that of the 6,000 academicians involved during the course of the eighteenth century, the privileged orders dominated at 57%.²³ The dominance of the privileged among honorary members, whose principal role was to serve as patrons and protectors, is logical and to be expected. However, far into a century when the roturier was gaining ground nearly everywhere, he failed to enter the privileged halls of academe in large numbers as an active, titular member. As in so many areas of corporate life under the Old Regime, the door was, Roche has found, only reluctantly opened to low-born talent: 'l'ouverture de la société académique est caractérisée par la prudence; elle respecte la réglementation et demeure accordée à la vision culturelle de cohésion sociale'.²⁴

Considering only those who were ordinary or titular members of the provincial societies, Roche in his research has established the existence of what he calls a 'modèle académique': at least 15-35% of ordinary members were from the First Estate; never less than 20% nor more than 45%

²² There were two models of academic members: in the Académie Française there were 40 members without distinction, all having the same rights and duties; in the Science Academy and the Academy of Inscriptions members could be honorary, titular/ordinary or corresponding with the distinctions reflecting both the amateur or professional status of members and whether they were resident or non resident. Most provincial academies were constituted according to the second model. Roche, Les Républicains des lettres, p. 166.

²³ Daniel Roche, Le Siècle des lumières, I, 197.

²⁴ Ibid, I, 198.

from the Second Estate, with the Third making up the balance with from 30% up to 55% in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. Yet, whatever increase there was in the number of provincial academicians from the Third Estate in the last decades of the century, the increase was gradual and seems to reflect more a growing laicization of society, indicated by declining numbers from the First Estate among ordinary members (and even overt hostility to religious within the academies) than it does a positive discrimination within the academies toward men from the Third Estate. Throughout the century members of the Second Estate still held a significant and influential number of seats in nearly all the academies. In fact, Roche has established that although academic membership was in principle open to the Third Estate, 'le seuil social que le recrutement académique ne franchit jamais' remained 'celui où s'affrontent dominants et dominés'.²⁵ The talented but low-born were admitted -- principally from Balzac's 'trois robes noires' -- only when their contribution to cultural and social life made their exclusion contradictory to the academies' governmentally imposed and pensioned 'visées utilitaires'.²⁶

In theory, of course, the academies were to enlist the services of an enlightened elite from whatever estate. Merit was to be the criterion of membership and therefore within the academies themselves all had equal right to express their opinions. That is why within the Académie Française it had been ruled that all academicians, in their private meetings, would speak, vote and be seated on an absolutely equal footing. This procedure was adopted by subsequent academies which, like the Paris academies, were created in part -- and in theory -- to provide men of talent from all three

²⁵ Ibid, I, 207.

²⁶ Roche, 'Sciences et pouvoirs dans la France du XVIIIe siècle (1666-1803)', Annales: E.S.C. (1974, No. 3), 740.

estates with the opportunity to contribute to 'l'amélioration du sort de l'homme' and to 'la transformation du monde'.²⁷ However, Roche's studies would seem to indicate that the reality in the provinces in the eighteenth century was somewhat different: the cultural elite of the Third Estate he describes seems to have been admitted into the academies less for the contributions they could make toward the 'transformation du monde' than to insure that the ideas and reforms they espoused in no way jeopardized the privileged world that they and their betters in the academies already enjoyed. Thus, to the academies' cultural role was now added the equally important task of social integration. No longer were the academies simply to contribute to the refinement of a language, a history, a culture and a body of information that would glorify the Crown and contribute to its achievements: now the academies were also to provide an institutional setting in which selected men from the Third Estate could be integrated harmlessly into the privileges and restrictions of the French cultural elite.²⁸

In his 'Preliminary Discourse' to the Encyclopédie, written in 1751 at a time when the author was still himself aspiring to membership in the Académie Française, d'Alembert gave perhaps the clearest statement of the

²⁷ Roche, 'Milieux académiques provinciaux et société des lumières: Trois académies provinciales au 18^e siècle: Bordeaux, Dijon, Châlons-sur-Marne', in François Furet, ed., Livre et société dans la France du XVIII^e siècle, 2 vols (Paris, Mouton, 1965 and 1970), I, 93-184 (p. 175).

²⁸ There were almost no academicians drawn from the commercial or manufacturing sector. Roche has found that bourgeois academicians were drawn essentially from the following six socio-professional groups: lower secular and regular clergy (23%); the medical professions (26%); the legal professions and administration (29%); the world of teachers, professors and savants, to which should be added a small number of 'rentiers' who were men of letters (less than 18%); and, finally, individuals involved in trade and manufacturing (less than 4%). Clerks, doctors and surgeons, lawyers and justice officials constituted more than three-quarters of the roturier recruitment in the provincial academies. Roche, Le Siècle des lumières, I, 235.

social service the academies were rendering to the Old Regime at mid-century:

De pareilles sociétés [les compagnies savantes] ne peuvent manquer de produire dans un État de grands avantages, pourvu [...] qu'on en bannisse toute inégalité propre à éloigner ou à rebuter des hommes faits pour éclairer les autres; qu'on n'y connaisse d'autre supériorité que celle du génie; que la considération y soit le prix du travail.

Nevertheless, if the Crown wanted to encourage their utility, the number of academies should not, he ventured, be 'multipli[é] à l'excès' nor should one 'facilite [...] l'entrée à un trop grand nombre de gens médiocres'; otherwise the academies would lose their elite status and their social utility to the State would be limited.²⁹

But genius had a price to pay in entering the academies and a price which d'Alembert candidly quantified in his Histoire des membres de l'Académie Française, which was published in 1787 after he was well-ensconced in the Académie Française as its permanent secretary. There he describes how the Crown benefited when the possibility of membership in the academy served as a device whereby the man of letters himself willingly moderated his own views to those of the society he aspired to enter, compromising his principles to gain the academic prize:

L'Académie Française est l'objet de l'ambition, secrète ou avouée, de presque tous les Gens de Lettres [...] & quel bien cette ambition ne peut-elle pas produire, entre les mains d'un Gouvernement éclairé. Plus il attachera de prix aux honneurs Littéraires, de considération à la Compagnie qui les dispense, plus la Couronne Académique deviendra une récompense flatteuse pour les Ecrivains distingués, qui joindront au mérite des Ouvrages l'honnêteté dans les moeurs & dans les écrits. Celui qui se marie, dit Bacon, donne les ôtages à la fortune; l'Homme de Lettres qui tient ou qui aspire à l'Académie, donne des ôtages à la décence. Cette chaîne, d'autant

²⁹ D'Alembert, Discours préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie publié intégralement d'après l'édition de 1763. Avec les avertissements de 1759 et 1763, la dédicace de 1751. Edited by F. Picavet (Paris, Armand Colin, 1929), p. 123.

plus puissante qu'elle est volontaire, le retiendra sans efforts dans les bornes qu'il seroit peut-être tenté de franchir.³⁰

By giving the impression of offering careers open to men of talent from all three estates, the academies allowed the Old Regime to neutralize at least some of its potentially greatest critics. And as reward the regime admitted the new academician to a company of men for whom 'un des fondemens essentiels de sa constitution [est] l'égalité Académique'. However, lest any one reading his history of those who had been admitted to the Academy in the eighteenth century think this principle in any way threatened the society of orders, d'Alembert hastened to add that the equality that reigned between members within their meetings was recognized by them to be 'une égalité [...] métaphysique pour ainsi dire' and thus 'si peu dangereuse'.³¹

Perhaps without realizing it d'Alembert had exposed the contradiction within the so-called Republic of Letters as experienced within the royal academies. Although academicians were theoretically independent and equal between themselves, the authority which recognized their competence and guaranteed their prestige and independence was the Crown. They were, quite literally, created equal by a monarchy which presided over and was based upon a society of orders. It was therefore, in the end, only a 'metaphysical' equality and a republic without any real freedom or even desire to do more than prop up the regime which kept them in a style to which they were growing accustomed -- in what Daniel Roche has called 'la

³⁰ Histoire des membres de l'Académie Française. Morts depuis 1700 jusqu'en 1771, pour servir de suite aux Éloges imprimés et lus dans les Seances publiques de cette Compagnie. Par M. D'Alembert, Secrétaire perpétuel de l'Académie Française, 6 vols (Paris, Moutard, 1787), I, xiv - xvi. Emphasis added.

³¹ Ibid, xxxi.

dépendance dorée'.³² Whatever their pretensions, it was ultimately the Crown which assigned them the role they were to play and most academicians were quite willing to play it. And once in the academies, members could look down -- as d'Alembert advised in the eighties -- upon those men of letters who failed to understand that 'dans la société, sur-tout dans un grand Etat, il est indispensable qu'il y ait entre les rangs une distinction marquée' and that 'si la vertu & les talens ont seuls droit à nos vrais hommages, la supériorité de la naissance & des dignités exigent notre déférence & nos Egards'.³³

Having surveyed all the provincial academies, their membership and their activities, Daniel Roche has concluded their essentially conservative nature. In his view, when those outside the old privileged orders were accepted as members into the academies -- which was increasingly the case as the eighteenth century progressed -- their acceptance marked their integration into a cultural elite which would function, despite the presence of more bourgeois members, not to change the social and political order but rather to provide it with greater justification. Seen from his perspective, the provincial academies of the eighteenth century appear to be the very embodiment of the political and cultural vision which first Richelieu and then Colbert and Louis XIV had for them when they had initiated the institutionalization of the academies more than a century earlier. However, in the eighteenth century the academies' enlightened sociology of cultural success had gradually given them an even more important and more overtly political role than even Louis XIV had envisaged: by accepting more and more men from the Third Estate the academies served to 'effacer dans la sphère privilégiée de la culture les

³² Roche, Le Siècle des lumières en province, I, 290.

³³ D'Alembert, Histoire des membres de l'Académie Française, xxxii.

antagonismes sociaux'. By offering men from the Third Estate the possibility of recognition by an academy, these privileged bodies played right into the hands of a monarchy obliged to sit on a society in ferment. Once absorbed into the academies, those formerly outside its privileged halls accepted what Roche describes as their 'idéologie de compromis [...]'. Leur attraction et leur force viennent de leur puissance d'intégration sociale' because for both members and monarch 'ce qui importe c'est la sublimation des contraires et la réconciliation des différences'. Thus the academies in the eighteenth century became what Roche calls 'le lieu rêvé ou les puissances de la parole restituent l'unité sociale'.³⁴

THE PUBLIC FACE OF ACADEME: THE PRIZE ESSAY CONTEST

But what of the royal academies' public face? Even if within their private meetings the academies were able to absorb the gifted and enlightened from outside the old privileged orders, initiating them into a type of egalitarian aristocracy, what face did they present to the public? The primary way in which the academies manifested their existence to the public was through their annual essay competitions. Each year the various academies in Paris and the provinces selected a question or questions which they then proposed for discussion by those outside their membership, offering prize money and publication for the best of the resulting essays. The academies announced their public competitions with great ceremony in their annual public meetings, providing detailed information about the terms of the competition and the amount of the prize, which each in theory would award to someone outside their number during the public assembly the following year. The question or questions were subsequently made known to

³⁴ Roche, 'Sciences et pouvoirs', pp. 746-47 and Le Siècle des lumières en province, I, 145. The phrase 'sociologie du succès' is Roche's. See 'Sciences et pouvoirs', p. 747.

a larger public through advertisements in newspapers and gazettes and through correspondence with the permanent secretaries of other learned societies as well as through members' own private network of correspondents.

Throughout the whole of the eighteenth century the provincial academies followed this procedure in announcing their public prize essay competitions. But, although the procedure for announcing the questions remained the same, there was a discernible evolution in the types of questions posed by the academies over the course of the century which may have reflected an evolution in the academies' own membership and which may also have prompted a new breed of essay competitor.

Historians, beginning with Daniel Mornet, who have surveyed the activities of the academies and the questions they posed for their public essay competitions over the course of the century agree that the focus of the academies' interests both in private and in their public meetings began to change somewhere near mid-century.³⁵ In the first half of the eighteenth century the academies asked questions which reflected both the preoccupations of the leisured amateur savants who made up the bulk of their membership and the often strict instructions given them by founders who had endowed their societies and the essay prizes they were offering.³⁶

³⁵ Daniel Mornet, Les Origines intellectuelles de la Révolution française, 1715-1787, 6^{ème} édition (Paris, Armand Colin, 1967), p. 147.

³⁶ To take only two examples, the rules of the Academy of Toulouse stipulated that 'les sujets que l'Académie propose annuellement ne pourront être que physico-mathématiques, médico-physiques et de littérature'; a topic from each of these 'genres' was to be proposed in rotation every third year. Michel Taillefer, quoting from the regulations the academy published in 1746, in his Une académie interprète des lumières: L'Académie des Sciences, Inscriptions, et Belles-Lettres de Toulouse au XVIII^e siècle (Paris, Éditions du CNRS, 1984), p. 131. The rules of the Dijon Academy, agreed in 1741, were only a variation on this theme: '[le prix] sera pour la première année, sur la physique; pour la seconde année, sur la morale; et, pour la troisième, sur la médecine; après quoi on recommencera toujours dans le même ordre'. Quoted by Tisserand, L'Académie de Dijon de 1740 à

The questions they asked in public were also strikingly similar to those they addressed in their private meetings: in private academicians wrote and spoke about literary or historical topics, prepared and presented commentaries on ancient texts and antiquarian essays on archeological research, practiced their rhetorical skills and listened as those taken up with scientific researches discoursed on physics, medicine or chemistry, or related the researches of scientists abroad. In their meetings academicians were expected to demonstrate both erudition and accomplished rhetorical skills and when they addressed questions to the public they expected them, too, to respond with essays which, in fact, only a very highly educated or leisured elite could possibly produce. Every year or in alternate years they offered prizes for the best example of rhetorical eloquence on historical topics or on questions within the 'moral' sciences or they posed highly specialized or speculative scientific questions which required knowledge and training beyond the scope of all but a tiny minority of erudite savants.

The competitors' essays were also expected to be politically -- and theologically -- correct. For example, in announcing its contest topics the Academy at Montauban stipulated that manuscripts should be countersigned by two doctors in theology (like those sent to the Académie Française) and that every competition essay should end with a short prayer. And in 1750 this same academy welcomed a discourse demonstrating that 'tous les écrivains qui abusent de leur talent en attaquant la religion, les mœurs et le gouvernement usurpent et profanent le titre d'hommes de lettres'.³⁷ Having surveyed and sampled essays presented to the academies in this early period as well as the subjects treated in their private meetings, Mornet

1793 au temps de l'Encyclopédie (Paris, Boivie et C^{ie}, 1936), p. 535.

³⁷ Mornet, Les Origines intellectuels, p. 147.

concluded that the discourses and treatises produced for and by the academies in the early part of the century were what an approving government might well have called 'des travaux proprement "académiques"; c'est-à-dire', Mornet continued, 'qu'ils ne sont que des exercices oratoires, de la rhétorique en prose ou en vers' or, for the more theoretically or technically minded, scientific in a manner accessible only to the devoted man of science.³⁸

Indeed, few outside learned circles would have been knowledgeable enough to discuss problems like the 'cheminement des urines' or the 'formation des pierres figurées', questions posed by the Bordeaux Academy in 1717 and 1725, or rhetorically trained and articulate enough to compose a discourse describing 'les avantages que le mérite retire de l'envie', posed by the Academy of Marseille in 1735 for its eloquence prize and taken up by the Dijon Academy for its competition in 1746.³⁹ To respond to these questions in a way acceptable to the academies, competitors needed to be either erudite or past-masters at the 'agréable' -- or perhaps both -- rich in personal libraries or scientific experience and equipment and possessed of abundant leisure and wit to proffer the polished essays worthy of an 'academic' prize.

Consequently, during the first half of the century competitors in the academies' public essay contests tended to be either members of some other academy or else dedicated amateur scientists with the time and inclination to write. Even so, questions liked these provoked few if any responses and the academies often found themselves unable to award their prizes -- even

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Delandine, Couronnes académiques, ou Recueil des Prix proposés par les Sociétés Savantes, avec les noms de ceux qui les ont obtenus, des Concurrents distingués, des Auteurs qui ont écrit sur les mêmes sujets, le titre le lieu de l'impression de leurs Ouvrages; précédé de l'Histoire abrégée des Académies de France (Paris, Cuchet, 1787).

after posing the questions repeatedly -- and forced sometimes to abandon a topic altogether because they had not received even a single response adequate to their expectations.⁴⁰

One of the most celebrated academic competitions of the century, that of the Dijon Academy in 1754 on 'l'origine de l'inégalité', provides a prime example of the difficulty the provincial academies had in attracting competitors whom they considered worthy of their prizes. Despite the public interest generated in the Dijon Academy's prize competition of 1750 on the topic 'si le rétablissement des lettres et des arts a contribué à épurer les mœurs',⁴¹ the contest it held four years later on the origins of inequality could scarcely be considered an overwhelming public success if measured only in terms of the numbers who chose to compete. Only fourteen competitors vied for the academy's prize in 1754 and, although essays by Rousseau and d'Argenson were among that number, the fourteen also included an essay by a competitor whose style and hand were so mediocre that the Dijon academicians sent it back 'à l'adresse qui y est marquée' without even taking the time seriously to read it.⁴² Thus, although a

⁴⁰ As late as 1766 and 1771, for example, when the Bordeaux Academy -- bound by its patron to pose scientific topics -- asked the public to treat the 'causes des coagulations' and the 'défauts des verres optiques', it received one and then no memoir(s) in response to its offered prize. Barrière, 'La Vie académique au XVIII^e siècle d'après un manuscrit du Président de Ruffey', Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France, (1952), p. 20.

⁴¹ Marcel Bouchard, L'Académie de Dijon et le premier discours de Rousseau, Publications de l'Université de Dijon, 6 (Paris, Société Les Belles Lettres, 1950). Although the academy's prize for that year went to Rousseau, the runner-up in the contest was the lawyer and historian Pierre-Jean Grosley from Troyes, who was an early corresponding member of the Châlons Société littéraire. I am grateful to Professor Alan Raitt for bringing this book to my attention. See, too, Roger Tisserand, L'Académie de Dijon p. 552.

⁴² Kathryn Willis Wolfe, 'Les Concurrents de J.J. Rousseau: Une étude des autres réponses à la question sur l'inégalité en 1754', Seminar paper presented, Spring 1971, Princeton University, pp. 1-2. Roger Tisserand, Les Concurrents de J.J. Rousseau à l'Académie de Dijon pour le prix de 1754

public essay contestant might, as Rousseau did,⁴³ testify to the dramatic impact that an academic competition had had on the life and thinking of one firmly outside the bounds of actual academic membership, for the academicians themselves many if not most of the essays they received from a public unfamiliar with the niceties of academic discourse proved a severe disappointment.⁴⁴

Even as the century progressed and the provincial academies began both accepting more of those outside the first two privileged orders as members and asking questions which fell more within the purview of an enlightened general public, a distinct cultural and intellectual barrier continued to exist between the academicians and their public essay competitors. At Dijon, where in fifty years 53 questions were put before the public, only 29 prizes were awarded; during this period there were nine topics which, despite being posed over and over again, never elicited a response which fulfilled the literary or conceptual requirements of the

(Paris, Boivin et Cie, 1936), p. 11.

⁴³ Rousseau states in his Confessions that it was the approbation of the Dijon Academy and the reception given his first Discours by the public on its publication which confirmed him in his true vocation as a writer: 'Quand [mon premier discours] eut remporté le prix, Diderot se chargea de le faire imprimer. [...] il m'écrivit un billet pour m'en annoncer la publication et l'effet. "Il prend", me marquait-il, "tout par-dessus les nues; il n'y a pas d'exemple d'un succès pareil". Cette faveur du public nullement brigüée et pour un auteur inconnu, me donna la première assurance véritable de mon talent dont malgré le sentiment interne j'avais toujours douté jusqu'alors.' Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes. Préface de Jean Fabre, présentation et notes de Michel Launay. 2 vols (Paris, Seuil, 1967). Vol. I. Oeuvres autobiographiques, pp. 260-61.

⁴⁴ Quoting in English a statement made by the secretary of the Academy of Sciences in 1750, Roger Hahn perfectly illustrates the disappointment and condescension of academicians for works submitted by non members: "We cannot hide the fact that, especially in its early days, the Academy more often praised the good intention of authors than the excellence of their work. Ideas often inherently sound were badly expounded, or mixed in amidst a large quantity of irrelevant matters". Hahn, Anatomy of a Scientific Institution, p. 61.

Dijon academicians. The situation was worse at Bordeaux. Of 149 topics announced for its public essay competitions over the century, only forty-five times did the academicians at Bordeaux award their prize and, each year from the 1760s onwards, the academy began multiplying its questions and its prizes in the hope that somehow this would provoke essays worthy of its prize. The same was true at Pau. From 1750 onward this academy habitually failed to award any prize at all. Although a public explanation was not given, the academic judges gave vent to their views in private reports to their fellow academicians. These reports are all variations on the same theme: the prizes could not be awarded 'vue la médiocrité des ouvrages qu'on a reçus'. So, although the number of contestants increased when the topics fell more within the knowledge and experience of the educated public, the quality of the essays seemed to the academies to be in serious decline.

The disparity between the academies' expectations and the public's response was too great to be overlooked and so repeatedly we find academicians admitting privately, as they did at Pau, that in their public essay contests, at least, they had failed to enter into direct contact with a larger public of enlightened Frenchmen.⁴⁵ In Toulouse the situation became so serious, that one of the judges for the competition in 1776 warned his fellow academicians that if they were not less severe in their judgements, they might soon lack any competitors at all for their contests:

⁴⁵ In the fifties alone the Academy at Pau refused seven times to award a prize even though by that date it had brought the number of potential annual prizes to three and even though, more importantly, it had publicly pledged itself to award them. As its historian notes, the Academy at Pau had in its public essay contests 'manqué à son véritable but: entrer en prise directe avec la réalité. L'opinion publique échappa de plus en plus à son influence [...]. Alors que le nombre des concurrents augmentait, celui des réponses satisfaisantes s'amenuisait'. Christian Desplat, L'Académie royale de Pau au XVIII^e siècle: Un milieu socio-culturel provincial (Pau, Société des sciences, lettres et arts de Pau, 1971), pp. 72-73.

'Craignons que nos combats ne cessent faute de combattants'.⁴⁶ This phenomenon seems to have been an experience common to most of the royal academies.

However, from mid-century the provincial academies -- both those founded at the beginning of the century and those only just operative -- began to profess public interest in more practical subjects of public utility. From this period onward even the doyen of eighteenth-century provincial academies, the Académie des sciences, arts et belles lettres of Bordeaux, which had been founded in 1712, confessed to a certain 'mépris' for 'les vaines contemplations de la philosophie', declaring that henceforth 'l'utilité de leur patrie' was to be 'le principal objet de leurs études'.⁴⁷ This transition in the preoccupations of a leisured class of amateur savants from 'belles lettres' or 'les sciences de la nature' to applied social, agricultural or economic sciences was consciously and clearly marked by the bordelais academicians whose founder had required them to choose topics of scientific interest for their contest questions. In a statement made public in 1752 the academy declared that in future it intended to concern itself with the public good: 'Elle [l'académie] n'a d'autre objet que le bien public. Elle veut tirer parti de nos connaissances, faire en un mot le bien de la société; toute la science du monde sans ce but honnête n'est que vanité'.⁴⁸ The phenomenon presents itself to a lesser or greater degree in the activities of all the provincial academies from this period and was undoubtedly read by those who

⁴⁶ The warning came from the academician Philippe Dumas following the judgement of the academy's competition in 1776. See Taillefer, Une académie interprète des lumières, p. 133.

⁴⁷ Excerpts from a statement issued by the Bordeaux Academy and cited by P. Barrière in L'Académie de Bordeaux: Centre de culture internationale au XVIII^e siècle (1712-1792), Bordeaux - Paris, Biere, 1958), p. 86.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 85. Emphasis added.

until that time had had little possibility of responding to their questions as an indication that matters of interest to them were now to be taken seriously by the Crown's privileged learned societies.⁴⁹

At least one historian has attributed the new interest in matters of social utility within the older academies to the influx of new members from the bourgeoisie.⁵⁰ Analysis of the social background of those admitted to the academies from mid-century would seem to support this view. For example, although the Bordeaux Academy recruited the majority of its ordinary members from the nobility throughout its eighty-year history (68% of its global membership 1712-92), members from the bourgeoisie slowly but surely increased in number from 26% in the first decade of the academy's existence to 58% in the last decade. And although for the first ten years of its existence, the Dijon Academy, founded in 1740, was dominated by members drawn from the First and Second Estates, academicians from the Third Estate were in the ascendancy from then on, accounting for 68% of new members from the academy's inception to its suppression in the Revolution and an enormous 77% of the corresponding or associate members of that society during the same period.⁵¹

Obviously a strict correlation cannot be made between changing patterns of recruitment into the academies, which gave members of the Third

⁴⁹ Mornet, Les Origines intellectuelles, pp. 147-52.

⁵⁰ Roger Tisserand, historian of the Dijon Academy, claims that as the membership of that academy evolved to include a preponderance of men from the Third Estate, it was these members, whose dedication to matters of public utility, directed the academy's activities and forged its claim to glory. Indeed, Tisserand goes so far as to conclude his study with the statement that academicians from the Third Estate were the animating element in the success of all late eighteenth century academies. 'Elles [the academies] ont rempli une vaste tâche grâce aux talents et aux vertus de la bourgeoisie'. Tisserand, L'Académie de Dijon p. 648.

⁵¹ Roche, 'Milieux académiques provinciaux', pp. 119, 132, 136 and 137.

Estate increasing prominence, and the new social utilitarian focus in the academies, which manifested itself from mid-century onward in almost all the academies, old and new -- and in the latter from their inception;⁵² however, an explanation for the new focus can be found in the wider cultural and political context in which the academic societies were operating in the final decades of Louis XV's reign. The new orientation towards matters of practical social utility in the academies undoubtedly reflected the increasing interest in applied sciences and the new authority ascribed to reason and experience by the philosophes and physiocrats and enshrined in Diderot's great Encyclopédie. It was also, and perhaps even more surely, a consequence of the government's concerted effort to acquire more and better information about local economic conditions and public attitudes to them by using the bureaucracy it had created -- and in which significant numbers among those now entering the academies worked -- to generate and gather the data it needed to make decisions of social and economic policy.

In 1760 Controller-General Bertin, acutely aware of the government's need to increase its revenues, commissioned the Intendants to carry out an extremely detailed survey of agricultural production, mapping what land was or was not under cultivation and why; he also urged the Intendants to initiate the creation of agricultural societies in every generality to contribute to this work. Building on interest among local landowners, the Crown's Intendants influenced the establishment of royal agricultural societies in Tours, Paris, Lyon, Limoges, Orléans, Auvergne, Rouen,

⁵² The shift of interests in the academies of Bordeaux and Dijon, as well as between the literary and academic societies at Châlons-sur-Marne, away from literary or scientific pursuits to questions of social import or of local or regional economic interest is surveyed by Daniel Roche in his article 'Milieux académiques provinciaux' in Livre et société, I, 93-184.

Soissons, Auch, La Rochelle, Bourges, Alençon, Hainaut and Provence, all of which were recognized by the Crown between 1761 and 1765, and instructed members to gather as much information and as many different opinions as they could about changing social and economic realities.⁵³ Bertin regularly dispatched detailed questionnaires throughout the kingdom to Intendants and subdelegates and to inspectors and local officials of the Bureau de Subsistance and the Bureau de Commerce in order to collect precise information about production and consumption, prices and wages, employment and unemployment and popular reaction to them.⁵⁴ And through the Intendants, who were also in most cases patrons and protectors of the royal academies, the Crown encouraged the academies, like the newly-formed agricultural societies, to contribute to the improvement of agriculture and related industry by drawing upon the practical knowledge and skills of their own members and by eliciting the views of the larger public as well through their public essay competitions.

⁵³ See Louis Passy, Histoire de la Société nationale d'Agriculture de France, Vol. I. 1761-1793 (Paris, Philippe Renouard, 1912) and Henri Pigeonneau and Alfred de Foville, L'Administration de l'Agriculture au Contrôle générale des finances (1785-1787). Procès-verbaux et rapports (Paris, Librairie Guillaumin et C^{ie}, 1882).

⁵⁴ Series F¹¹ (Subsistance) and F¹² (Commerce) in the Archives nationales in Paris contain the bulk of this correspondence and reveal the full extent of the government's efforts to acquire precise information about local social and economic conditions. The following comment, contained in a circular letter sent by Bertin in August 1760 to all France's intendants, is a good example of the government's new interest in agricultural improvement and its attempts to use its bureaucracy to promote it. 'Le Roi, occupé des moyens d'étendre et de perfectionner l'agriculture de son royaume, m'a chargé de vous écrire pour vous engager à porter de plus en plus vos réflexions sur un objet aussi important.' Archives nationales F¹² 149, quoted in Georges Weulersse, Le Mouvement physiocratique en France (de 1756 à 1770), II, 160. For a good summary of the government's use of the bureaucratic network of the Bureau de Commerce to collect and disseminate information in the provinces see Harold T. Parker, The Bureau of Commerce in 1781 and its Policies with Respect to French Industry (Durham, North Carolina, Carolina Academic Press, 1979) and Parker, An Administrative Bureau during the Old Regime: The Bureau of Commerce and Its Relations to French Industry from May 1781 to November 1783 (London - Toronto, Associated University Presses, 1993).

Even local societies which had not yet attained official status were persuaded that they might contribute advice and information to the Crown on matters economic and agricultural and, as we shall see, they too devoted themselves to the task in hand. The modest literary society which had begun meeting in Châlons-sur-Marne at mid-century was among the first of the literary societies consistently and explicitly to pursue the new public interest in agricultural matters. Echoing in its way the new orientation towards the practical which the great Academy at Bordeaux had expressed in its newly-discovered commitment to the socially useful, the Châlons literary society, in an article which appeared in the Journal économique in 1762, promised henceforth to 'se livrer avec plus d'application que par le passé à la partie de l'agriculture, le plus nécessaire de tous les arts'.⁵⁵ The government's appeal for practical advice and information was having its effect and this -- abetted by the philosophes' persistent propaganda about the potential advisory role of an enlightened citizenry -- seems to have prompted not only officials and academicians but manufacturers and merchants, town councillors, parish priests, doctors, lawyers, gentlemen farmers and even urban artisans and peasant small-

⁵⁵ Journal économique, January 1762, p. 6, quoted in Weulersse, Le Mouvement physiocratique, II, 161. It is not surprising that the Châlons Société littéraire made its announcement in the Journal économique. Two of its 'associés externes' or corresponding members, Jean-François Dreux du Radier and Antoine Le Camus, were regular contributors and sometimes 'responsables' of the journal, which specifically eschewed science, theology and the arts to concentrate instead on agriculture and commerce. Like both the Société littéraire and the Académie of Châlons, the Journal économique promised its readers to be 'utiles à la société' 'en lui présentant un recueil de mémoires récents sur l'agriculture, les arts et le commerce'. Like the Châlons societies, too, it deliberately set its own useful contributions against the frivolity of the century: 'le grand nombre des ouvrages économiques que nous indiquons avec avantage contre les romans et les autres livres futiles qu'on pourrait reprocher à notre siècle. Nous opposerons les chambres d'agriculture aux salles de spectacles et les savants et infatigables naturalistes aux auteurs de théâtre'. The citations are taken from a 1751 and a 1772 edition of the journal, quoted in Dictionnaire des Journaux, 1600-1789, edited by Jean Sgard, 2 vols (Paris, Universitas; Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1991), II, 729.

holders, too, to believe that the Crown was committed to understanding and addressing the economic problems being faced by all his subjects.⁵⁶

Those from the general public who decided to respond to the wave of enthusiasm in elite circles for matters that were the stuff of ordinary life to those outside the academies and to do so by themselves entering a public essay competition must surely have been flattered to think that their views were of interest to those who might influence policy. And they may also have had another, and perhaps even more pressing, reason for submitting their ideas for judgement by members of a learned society. Although perhaps of secondary importance, the possibility of winning the substantial prize money offered by the academies for the most 'useful' essay was an undoubted incentive to some. The Bordeaux Academy offered prizes which ranged in value from 300 livres up to 1200 livres (for its 1778 contest on 'le meilleur moyen de préserver les nègres des maladies pendant leur transport') while at Toulouse the competition prize was worth 200 livres, at Marseille, Lyon and Nîmes 300 livres, at Dijon 300 to 400 livres, and at Arras the academy promised 500 livres to its winner.⁵⁷ The academy at Pau, without a rich patron, was unable to offer significant prize money, and its historian has concluded that the penury of the Pau academy may well account for the fact that only 'des hommes désintéressés matériellement' competed in its contests.⁵⁸ For at least a portion of those entering the contests, the financial incentive of an academic prize

⁵⁶ See my 'What price economic prosperity? Public Attitudes to Physiocracy in the Reign of Louis XVI', in British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies, 9 (1986), 183-96.

⁵⁷ Taillefer, Une académie interprète des lumières, p. 145.

⁵⁸ Desplat, L'Académie royale de Pau p. 75.

was not wholly irrelevant as they considered the time and effort involved in writing an essay for competition.⁵⁹

However, for the ambitious men of letters who were otherwise without access to official public forums, the promise of publication for the winning essays that the academies included in the announcements of their contest questions was perhaps a greater incentive still. Journals like the Mercure de France and the Journal des savants were certain to list the name of the prize winner and even provide a summary of his argument. Doors that had once been closed to the obscure but aspiring author would be opened and barriers that had once seemed unbreachable would fall before the winner of a contest in which the academicians had stated explicitly that the contestant's social rank was irrelevant as long as his essay merited praise. The academies' contest notices pledged that the academic competition was 'libre à tous ceux qui voudront concourir',⁶⁰ and assured potential competitors, as Daniel Roche affirms, that 'seul le mérite doit être prise en considération sans tenir compte du prestige ou du rang pour attribuer les récompenses'.⁶¹ Roche, on the basis of his study of the thousand essayists he identified as having competed for the prize of at least one academy's public essay competition at some time in the century,

⁵⁹ Marcel Bouchard reminds us what the Dijon Academy's prize meant to Rousseau financially. From his Confessions we know that Rousseau, even in the days before he had rejected luxury, needed only 800 to 900 livres a year to maintain himself in Paris, pay for his food and the lodgings he kept near his employer and for the separate lodgings he maintained for Thérèse and the Le Vasseur family. So the 300 livres prize money for the 1750 competition would more than have covered Rousseau's expenses for four months and that was in Paris. In the provinces the sum would, of course, have gone much further. L'Académie de Dijon et le premier discours de Rousseau, pp. 48-49.

⁶⁰ The wording is taken from the Dijon Academy's announcement of its 1750 competition which appeared in the October 1749 Mercure de France. See Bouchard, L'Académie de Dijon, p. 46.

⁶¹ Roche, 'Milieux académique provinciaux', p. 157.



concluded that there was substantial evidence to indicate that an educated public, excluded both socially and professionally from day-to-day academic activity, firmly believed the academies' pledges of unbiased judging and used the opportunity offered by their competitions to seek a public forum for their essays and, perhaps, through the academies to reach a national audience with their ideas. Roche found that a social breakdown of the responding public revealed an 'inversion de la hiérarchie académique', marked by the predominance of intellectual and service professions and by the emergence of new groups -- including (exceptionally) even 'gens de métiers et paysans'.⁶² Thus, essayists from the Second Estate were relatively rare (9.5% of the total), while 'hommes des lettres et de sciences' made up 10%, doctors 11% and lawyers 17% which, added to the parish priests and curates, religious, abbés and seminarists who belonged to the lower clergy brought the sum of those competing in academic competitions with origins in the Third Estate to a total of 70% of the 1,000 essayists Roche was able to identify.

Nevertheless, the rise in the participation of those normally denied membership in the academies was not marked by a similar rise in the number of prizes being awarded to them for, as we have seen, more often than not the essays submitted from the larger Republic of Letters did not meet with the approval of the judging academicians. A cultural and intellectual barrier continued to exist between academies and their public despite the social barriers falling before the advancing bourgeois tide both within the academies' membership and among their essay competitors. Roche, who more than anyone else has attempted to elucidate a summary eighteenth-century 'mentalité', has assembled what reads almost as a collective cahier de doléances drawn up from the comptes rendus of judging academicians writing

⁶² Roche, Le Siècle des lumières, I, 336.

in disgust about the 'essays' submitted to them by members of the literate general public who dared believed that their views might be worthy of an academic prize. From early in the century to its end, from Bordeaux to Lyon to La Rochelle, the complaints were the same:

'expressions basses, comparaison puérile'... 'mémoire trivial, doit être considéré comme nul'... 'plusieurs phrases prouveraient que l'auteur n'a pas l'habitude d'écrire'... 'idées communes et quelquefois inintelligibles' ... 'faiblement pensé, faiblement écrit'... 'les fautes d'orthographe[] sont celles qui m'ont choqué le moins'... 'l'auteur prévient qu'il n'a jamais fait de classe, il est aisé de s'en apercevoir' ... 'misérablement écrit' ... 'trivial dans le style' ... 'fatras indigeste' 'style commun' ... 'pleins de bonnes choses, mais style de charretier'.⁶³

In their assessments of the essays submitted to them by these 'hommes sans lettres', the academicians clearly stood on their side of the social and the cultural barrier which lay between those appointed to encourage the arts, sciences and letters in their towns and provinces and the literate public who stood caps in hand outside the academies, believing that participation in the essay competitions of the royal academies might somehow earn them citizenship in the new and more egalitarian Republic of Letters.

Thus even when the provincial academies began posing questions for their prize essay competitions which bore a more pronounced social utilitarian orientation and, as a result, attracted a more broadly-based

⁶³ This composite picture of the essays submitted by those whom their academic judges seem to have regarded disdainfully as self-taught, self-appointed (and self-important) spokesmen for public opinion was drawn by Daniel Roche from comptes rendus of competition essays submitted to the academies of Bordeaux, Lyon and La Rochelle. See Roche in Le Siècle des lumières, I, 340-41. One finds similar remarks in the judgements made by the academy of Dijon: 'on ... ne trouve pas un morceau éloquent. Le style est sans élévation et sans chaleur; il est hérissé de tournures louches, d'images incohérentes, d'épithètes parasites, de termes hasardés ou impropres. Point de réflexions ou de maximes qui ne soient triviales ou fausses'; 'on trouve [...] des morceaux bien faits et fort éloquents, mais bien plus encore d'endroits faibles, d'éloges outrés et [...] aucune espèce de transition supportable, une monotonie de tournures, une infinité d'expressions familières jusqu'à la bassesse et un style peu correct'. Cited in Tisserand, L'Académie de Dijon, p. 565.

response from the literate public, in most instances a great socio-economic and cultural divide separated the provincial academic elites from the lettered but undistinguished public who competed in increasing numbers in their prize essay contests from mid-century onward. It has been difficult for historians to gauge the breadth of this divide. Basing their assessments of the ideas and origins of those competing in these contests upon often incomplete and unidentified essay sources, supplemented only by the consciously selective 'comptes rendus' of the judging academicians, historians like Roche have found ample evidence of the divide separating academic society and the majority of those who competed in their contests without, however, being able to identify who made up that public. A comparison of the number of surviving essays with even partial accounts of the numbers competing reveals that academies frequently kept only those essays awarded their prizes or 'accessits'; the remainder were either discarded or, if the competitor had so requested, returned to sender without comment as unworthy of the academy's attention. Essays extant for any one contest therefore may exclude most of those submitted and so a reading of them may well reveal more about the 'mentalité' of the academic elite who judged them than about the literate public who had poured their time and energy and ideas into essays they hoped might somehow compete for the academies' attention and prizes.

The obstacles to a comprehension of the social and cultural world of the responding public of the provincial academies are further compounded by the anonymity guaranteed the authors by the contest judges. Because essays were to be read and judged on the basis of merit alone, contestants were instructed not to sign their essays but rather to assign them an appropriate motto or slogan and then submit the repeated devise with their name and address on a separate slip of paper, which was to be seen only

after the academy had reached its final decision.⁶⁴ Time and inattention have led to the loss of many of these identifying slips and so archivists and historians have frequently been unable to identify the authors of the essays that did survive. And even when both essay and essayists have been known quantities, the social or professional background of the essayists has often been unknown and unascertainable.

What remains from the public essay competitions of most provincial academies in the eighteenth century thus discloses a very partial picture of those members of the literate public who may once have attempted to express their views to a royal learned society. However, even if the academies had not discarded or been careless of the essays submitted to them by the public, still another factor prejudices our understanding of the opinions of those members of the literate public who might have been touched by the annual essay competitions of the provincial academies: whether by inclination or political expediency, most provincial academies did not pose questions which in any way trespassed upon the Crown's injunction against discussion of 'les matières [...] politiques' which might bring into question 'l'autorité du prince [...] l'état du gouvernement et [les] lois du royaume'; they therefore specifically excluded any essay, indeed, any contest topic which might in any way be

⁶⁴ Elaborate explanations were announced with the contest questions to explain the required procedure to the uninitiated: 'Comme on ne saurait prendre trop de précautions, tant pour rendre aux savants la justice qu'ils méritent, que pour écarter, autant qu'il est possible, les brigues et cet esprit de partialité, qui n'entraînent que trop souvent les suffrages vers les objets connus, ou qui les en détournent, par d'autres moyens également irréguliers [...] chaque auteur sera tenu de mettre, au bas de son mémoire, une sentence ou devise, et d'y joindre une feuille de papier cacheté sur le dos de laquelle sera la même sentence, et sur le cachet son nom, ses qualités et sa demeure, pour y avoir recours à la distribution des prix. Lesdites feuilles ainsi cachetées, de façon qu'on ne puisse y rien lire à travers, ne seront point ouvertes avant ce temps-là, et le secrétaire en tiendra un registre exact.' Taken, again, from the announcement of the 1750 Dijon competition which appeared in the October 1749 Mercure de France cited in Bouchard, L'Académie de Dijon, p. 46.

construed as threatening the sanctity or authority of Church or State. Even under the long and liberal administration of Malesherbes, who allowed advanced opinions on political matters to circulate if they were of no obvious threat to the government, the royal academies continued to pose questions devoid of political content.

Although reforming ministers like Bertin and Turgot encouraged the creation of yet more learned societies, particularly agricultural societies, and applauded the increasingly social utilitarian focus of the topics being considered by these societies in their private meetings and by an informal public invited by them to write on technical or agricultural matters, these same ministers knew that there were limits -- limits reflecting both the fears of other government ministers and the political danger of adverse public opinion -- to what could be discussed by the public. So, for example, when on Turgot's suggestion the Société d'Agriculture in his intendancy of Limoges posed in 1766 a question 'sur l'effet de l'impôt indirect sur le revenu des propriétaires des biens fonds', the minister L'Averdy wrote to Bertin complaining: 'Je crois que vous pensez comme moi que ce ne sont point là des matières dont les Sociétés d'Agriculture doivent s'occuper [...] et qu'il serait même dangereux qu'elles s'en occupassent'. Worse still, L'Averdy insisted, 'il doit paraître encore plus extraordinaire qu'elles proposent ces questions à traiter au public'. Bertin, who was the author and defender of the agricultural societies feared that suppression of the competition would cause the government adverse publicity; but, to appease L'Averdy and to remind the Limoges society just what were the limits of its usefulness and so the limits of its liberty, Bertin wrote to the agricultural society, requiring it to send him the one essay it had thus far received for its competition. And although Bertin eventually returned the essay to them,

he counselled society members to keep secret 'un mémoire dont l'objet concerne uniquement le ministère et qui contient d'ailleurs des déclamations déplacées sur l'administration des finances'.⁶⁵

The strict guidelines under which the agricultural and academic societies were allowed to function in the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI were merely an extension of the political philosophy operative a century earlier when Louis XIII and Louis XIV created the first royal academies to control discussion of potentially dangerous subjects and to channel the research and intellectual resources of an enlightened elite into Crown service. The passage of time had done nothing to alter the circumstances under which the Crown viewed its men of letters: their service was limited to the exigencies of that delicate balancing and counter-balancing of vested and public interests under which the Crown itself was forced to operate.⁶⁶ Their recognition of the limited nature of their privileged existence as the king's men was as essential under Louis XV and his successor as it had been under Louis XIII and Louis XIV. 'Sans cela',

⁶⁵ Archives Nationales H 1503 quoted by André Bourde, Agronomie et agronomes en France au XVIII^e siècle, 3 vols (Paris, S.E.V.P.E.N., 1967), III, 1196-97. Emphasis added. As he was at pains to explain to L'Averdy in a letter which he wrote to him the same day (20 April 1766) he wrote to the Limoges society, Bertin was convinced that precipitous action by the government forbidding the Limoges society to hold a competition which it had already announced posed a greater threat than simply allowing it to continue but unremarked: 'plusieurs personnes l'ont déjà oublié parce qu'il est un peu métaphysique et ce serait éveiller l'attention de ceux qui l'ont mieux aperçu si on le proscrivait aujourd'hui'. He then went on to defend the agricultural societies as useful bodies.

⁶⁶ Even a minister as liberal as Malesherbes, who was head of government censorship between 1750 and 1763 and whose personal conviction would seem to have favoured greater tolerance in the publication of matters related to government policy, was forced to recognize that 'en France [...] où l'autorité supérieure réside dans le monarque, il serait dangereux de laisser paraître des ouvrages où son autorité serait discutée et où certaines opérations seraient décriées, dans le cas où le décri de ces opérations pourrait en empêcher l'effet'. Quoted by Pierre Grosclaude in his Malesherbes: Témoin et interprète de son temps (Paris, Fischbacher, [1961]), p. 185.

Bertin wrote to the Agricultural Society of Auch in 1774, when it had overstepped the bounds in criticizing the governments arrêts on the grain trade,

les membres de ces sortes de société s'établiraient eux-mêmes sans y penser, comme un corps qui prendrait parti ou pour un intérêt ou pour un autre [...] au lieu qu'elles doivent être [...] un corps en un mot en qui le gouvernement puisse reposer sa confiance et dont les avis à ce titre ne peuvent jamais causer aucun inconvénient.⁶⁷

Never were they to presume to speak, as the Auch Agricultural Society had, 'au nom du peuple et du général de la province', but instead and always voluntarily to limit themselves 'aux démarches d'un zèle et de pure confiance [...] pour le succès des représentations'.⁶⁸ Clearly even though the government was lifting some of the controls it had previously imposed on censorship, public discussion of 'inconvenient' truths -- especially those related to the administration of taxes and the economy -- was not within the brief of the Crown's academies and agricultural societies.

The public, of course, was unaware of the restraints being imposed by ministers on bodies like the agricultural societies and the academies. So, too, were those forming the local literary societies which proliferated in the provinces from mid-century.⁶⁹ Those attending these unofficial bodies were outsiders to the official academies and therefore unlikely to understand that the granting of privileged status as a royal academy was

⁶⁷ Archives Nationales H 1508, Bertin to the Société d'agriculture of Auch in 1774, when it criticized the arrêts du conseil of 23 October 1770 and 29 October 1773 on the grain trade. Quoted in Bourde, Agronomie et agronomes, III, 1198. My emphasis.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Citing Mornet, William Doyle estimates that there were roughly forty to fifty private literary societies in the period from mid-century to the Revolution. See Doyle, Origins of the French Revolution, student edition (Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 79.

not a signal from the Crown authorizing members to submit their views to government ministers as befitting those recognized for their intellectual, cultural and practical scientific merit.

As we shall see, the Châlons Société littéraire shared public naïveté about these matters. Ignorant of the restrictions imposed by officers of the central government upon the public discussion of reform topics and of concern in the ministry that the government should not be seen to be controlling its learned bodies, the provincials who began meeting as a local literary society in Châlons in the 1750s brought to their efforts to be recognized as a royal academy all their optimistic aspirations to be local advisers to their Intendant and through him to the government ministers. This same naïve optimism continued to inform all their activities even after they had gained the letters-patent which recognized their corporate existence as France's latest royal Académie des sciences, arts et belles lettres. As we shall see, the political innocence of the fledgling Châlons academicians and their contest public about the limits the government placed upon public discussion of reform initiatives being essayed by Crown ministers was to play a significant role both initially in the success of the Academy's early contests and later in the government's subsequent decision to withdraw the Academy's privilege to choose its contest topics, award its prizes or publish the essays the public submitted to it. Despite the formidable success of its public competitions prior to government intervention, the ultimate failure of this academy to attract significant numbers to its competitions in the years following censorship of its questions was thus, ironically, the direct result of its early success in posing for public competition questions which were so close to the hearts and minds of the public outside the controlled forum of academic discourse that they constituted a serious

threat to vested interests and therefore to the very survival of the reforming ministers whose initiatives the Châlons academicians had hoped their contests would support. But the Châlons Academy's relationship with its competing public was exceptional.

The archives of the Châlons Academy provide the historian with full, of laborious, entry into the social, cultural and political world of its contests and their public. Because this Academy explicitly committed itself to pursue what was useful to society at large and to use its contests to gather information and views related to the reforms to poor relief, taxation, administration, justice and education currently being discussed in the highest government circles and essayed experimentally in the country, it not only attracted an exceptionally large response to its contests from the literate public, it also proved a careful steward of the essays submitted to it by that public, especially of those essays submitted for its earliest public competitions during the first years of Louis XVI's reign. Unlike other academies, the Châlons society posed for public discussion questions which were explicitly political: it announced a contest question on the plight of the beggar in the period when Turgot had just closed most of L'Averdy's dépôts de mendicité and then seen this policy reversed when he fell from office; it asked the public for its views on the reform of the corvée when first Turgot and then Necker were trying to introduce reforms in the assessment and administration of that duty; it announced a competition on the introduction of provincial assemblies in a statement that made explicit reference to Necker's new provincial assembly in Berry. The nature and topicality of these questions were sufficient to ensure broad public interest in the essay competitions of the fledgling Châlons Academy. And yet, the Academy also insisted in print that, in judging its contest essays, it would give useful ideas or information

precedence over language or style. Moreover, the Academy publicly committed itself to extract something -- 'quelque vue utile' -- from virtually all the essays submitted to it by the public and to produce published résumés of its contest essays. It thus encouraged men and women who might not otherwise have competed in an academic contest to venture to express their views before this unusual royal body. As confident as their competitors that the Crown was eager to have the advice and support of an enlightened public, the Academy's officers and commissioners carefully ordered the manuscripts submitted for their judgement. Conscious of the responsibility they bore to their authors, to their fellow academicians and to the government and government officials who would be the first readers of their publications, the editors of the Academy's résumés were careful custodians of the texts submitted to them and have left an exceptional record of the social and political vision of an eighteenth century academy and its competition public.

Prominent in the archives of the Châlons Academy are the essays from its first contest, posed in 1776 for 1777, on the plight of the beggar. This competition provoked a public response more than eighteen times the national average for an eighteenth-century academic competition.⁷⁰ Complete or partial essays survive for nearly all the memoirs submitted for

⁷⁰ This figure is based on Daniel Roche's figures for the average number of contest essays submitted from the public for nineteen provincial academies, which he divides into two groups: those receiving on average between 13 and 16 submissions per competition and those receiving between 5 and 10. The 126 essays the Châlons Academy received for its first competition -- 118 of them received in time to compete -- made its first contest easily the most popular public essay competition for the whole century. Only the question posed by the Academy of Lyon in 1785 on the fashionable subject of hot air balloons (99 entries) came anywhere near the record number submitted to the Châlons Academy for its first competition. Le Siècle des lumières, I, 329-335. On the Lyon competition see Roger Chartier 'L'Académie de Lyon au XVIII siècle: Étude de sociologie culturelle' in Nouvelles études lyonnaises (Geneva - Paris, Droz, 1969), p. 194 and Taillefer, Une académie interprète des lumières, p. 162.

this contest, as for the majority submitted for the Academy's complimentary question, posed for 1782 and 1783, on the plight of France's labouring poor.⁷¹ And, although the great advantage of these two contests is that the subjects are complementary and the competition essays so nearly complete, since the Châlons academicians were such faithful stewards of all the manuscripts submitted to it by the public, even the absence of memoirs from the archives of this Academy can be revealing. When the Academy's correspondence reveals that there were a not insignificant number of competitors for a contest, the absence of essays serves as silent testimony to the hand of ministerial censors. The absence of memoirs on reform of provincial administration, on the recompense due the falsely accused, on reforms to judicial procedure and practice and on popular education from the Academy's dossiers provides evidence not of this academy's failure to attract a public but rather clear proof that the Châlons Academy had succeeded in tapping a rich source of public concern: as we shall see, essays missing from its files were removed as a direct result of government censorship, either confiscated by ministers or withdrawn by wary authors. As we shall see, once the Academy lost the privilege of freely choosing its contest questions and publishing the resulting essays from the public, the number of essay competitors declined sharply. But examination of the essays written for these competitions reveals that these essays too rehearse the social and economic anxieties and the appeal to the Crown to initiate significant reforms which had been the common theme of the Academy's earlier contest essays. The chapter

⁷¹ For the 1776-1777 competition on the begging poor, 113 complete or partial memoirs have survived with an additional 7 summaries by the Academy of the memoirs that are missing. The complimentary contest question for 1782-1783 on the plight of the labouring poor generated 46 essays, 32 of which are extant, and which like those for the first contest were submitted by Frenchmen from many sectors of the literate population.

which follows will attempt to explain the social, economic, the political and cultural factors which lay behind the private and the public activities of the Châlons Academy and which together formed the basis of the political naïveté and the optimism which prompted the members of this minor provincial academy to enlist the help of a wider public in its own work for the Crown in support of reform.

II

A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE ON NATIONAL REFORM:

THE LITERARY SOCIETY AND ACADEMY OF CHALONS-SUR-MARNE

Within two months of his magnificent coronation in nearby Reims, Louis XVI signed the letters patent which transformed what had been only a local literary society into his latest royal academy, the Académie des Sciences, Arts et Belles Lettres of Châlons-sur-Marne, investing it with powers and privileges which promised its members a new and public role in French national life. Before the next year was out -- and within months of their letters-patent having been registered by the Paris Parlement -- the Châlons academicians made their earliest announcements of the first of a series of social utilitarian public essay competition questions aimed specifically at eliciting the views of those normally excluded from the academic universe of discourse, men whom the Academy in its first published résumé called 'une multitude d'hommes qui valent mieux qu'elle [the academy itself]'.¹ Announcing contest questions which addressed problems about which virtually any French man or woman would have had some sort of opinion, the Academy made it known that it would consider any essay submitted to it as long as it contained information or views which might contribute to the resolution of whatever social or economic problem, abuse, injustice or reform issue was the focus of its contest that year.

¹ Malvaux, Les Moyens de détruire la mendicité en France, edition of 1780, p. 504. The first printed announcement that I have found of the Academy's announcement of its contest questions for 1777 and 1778 -- on the begging poor and on reforms in the assessment and administration of the corvée -- is in the Journal de Champagne for 5 August 1776.

Unlike other academies, whose primary concern as cultural guardians of the nation was that writings they considered should be 'dignes [...] par le sujet, [...] par la manière dont il pouvait être traité' or 'par le style de l'auteur',² the Châlons Academy in all its public statements set forth utility to the people as the touchstone by which it intended to measure its own activities and those of the submissions it hoped to receive from the larger public. In his introduction to the first book published by the Academy its first director, the abbé Malvaux, contrasted the concerns of the Châlons Academy with those of other learned societies, publicly professing the Châlons society's peculiar commitment to the task of promoting the public good:

Rien ne manquerait au bonheur de l'Académie si elle pouvait par ses efforts contribuer au soulagement de[s] malheureux. A l'Utilité, telle est la Devise qu'elle s'est choisie. Assez d'autres sans elle sauront animer l'Eloquence, la Poésie; seront les Arbitres du bon goût, & les Oracles du génie; assez d'autres iront découvrir la vérité à travers la nuit des tems; étendront la sphere de nos connoissances, reculeront les bornes de l'esprit humain. L'Académie de Chaalons a juré sur l'Autel du Bien public, de s'occuper spécialement des objets qui peuvent rendre les hommes heureux; elle sera fidèle à son serment.³

In this task the Châlons academicians expressly sought the help of informed members of the general public whom they hoped would submit essays that would suggest practical reforms which were born of their own knowledge or experience of the social, economic, fiscal or administrative factors contributing to the hardships suffered by ordinary Frenchmen. Contest announcements made it clear that in judging competitors' essays social utility would outweigh all other considerations. Indeed, both in public and in private the Châlons academicians expressly committed themselves to

² This statement by the academicians of Bordeaux in 1762 is quoted by Barrière in L'Académie de Bordeaux, p. 39.

³ Malvaux, Les Moyens de détruire la mendicité, viii. This was a theme the Academy reiterated in virtually all its public statements.

ignore stylistic infelicities in order to pursue the practical insights buried in the midst of even the most badly written competition essay. Referring gratefully to the more than one hundred competitors who submitted essays for the Academy's first contest, Malvaux in the introduction to his published résumé informed his readers that

parmi ces différens Mémoires, il n'en est presque point qui ne renferment quelque vue utile. Nous avons tâché de nous bien pénétrer de l'esprit de chacun en particulier, d'en former un système dont toutes les parties fussent liées, & dont l'exécution fût possible & même facile.⁴

In its private comments about the essays it received the Châlons Academy was no less generous, no less receptive to the useful ideas it was sent by authors whose literary sophistication or social or educational background was often somewhat less than academic. Reporting to his colleagues about one of the competition essays submitted for a contest in 1786, an academic judge recommended the memoir for serious consideration despite its style because of the practical wisdom it contained, the fruit of the author's many years of experience as a master carpenter for the royal navy.

Ce mémoire, composé par un maître charpentier employé depuis long tems dans les chantiers de la marine royale, ne doit pas être considéré pour le stile qui est tel que l'on peut attendre d'un sujet qui n'a reçu qu'une éducation très bornée: mais à raison de la longue expérience de l'auteur. Il contient des vues utiles [...].⁵

The Châlons Academy judged the essays it received not with an ear as to whether the voice of its author were cultured or not but rather to assess

4 Ibid.

⁵ AD Marne I J 53. The comment appears in the Academy's report on the third essay it received for its competition 'Sur les moyens de prévenir en France et particulièrement dans la province la disette des bois, tant de charpente civile, militaire et navale que pour le charronage, chauffage et autres'. The essay, which was sent from Le Havre, was signed 'Fabien' and the author indicated that he was offering the Academy ideas which were the fruit of 'l'expérience d'un travail long et assidu' since for thirty years he had been responsible for receiving wood for the naval dockyards of Brest and Le Havre and had worked under many officers in assessing the quality of wood.

the practicality of the ideas it conveyed.⁶ Indeed, the Academy regarded the message coming from the people through these contests to their 'jeune Roi' -- 'le projet que nous osons mettre sous les yeux du Gouvernement' -- so important, so urgent and so different from what Louis XVI might be hearing from any other source that it judged that the form of expression was of much less importance than the message their essays contained.⁷

In the view of the Châlons academicians exclusivity and enlightenment represented a contradiction in terms, a denial of their publicly expressed belief that 'c'est du choc des idées [...] qui naît souvent la plus grande lumière'.⁸ And since as local notables, members of the literary society, and now academicians they had been and would continue to be preoccupied with finding some way of alleviating or at least addressing many of the problems caused or suffered by the poor of their own town and region, the new academicians decided to use their annual essay competitions to focus the attention of a wider public specifically on problems like those they

⁶ This is not to say, however, that the Châlons Academy was totally tone-deaf. Some of the offerings being made by its competitors were clearly too much for it. For example, the Academy's comment on the essay by the Montmedier curé Urban: 'Le mémoire No. 11 n'offre rien d'intéressant par rapport à la question proposée. La manière dont il est écrit fait regretter le tems que l'on a employé à le lire; pourquoi on estime qu'il ne mérite aucune attention.' AD Marne I J 49 No. 11. Or, its criticism of an unidentified essayist from Belfort whose ambitions to rise to rhetorical heights were hampered by his lack of the necessary equipment: 'déclamation presque continuelle et toujours déplacée. Stile peu soutenu et rarement juste. Il veut prendre l'essor et n'a point d'ailles'. AD Marne I J 41 No. 94. In both these cases, however, the fundamental criticism that the Academy is levelling at the essay is a lack of substantive content and not merely stylistic failings.

⁷ The phrases are taken from the preface and the conclusion to the résumé of the memoirs on begging.

⁸ This quotation is taken from the preface to the Academy's résumé of the essays that it received for its second public competition, which was held in 1778 and 1779, but which it was not allowed to publish until 1787 when it appeared under the title Les Moyens les moins onéreux à l'état et au peuple de construire et d'entretenir les grands chemins; tirés des mémoires qui ont concouru pour le prix accordé en 1779 par l'Académie de Châlons-sur-Marne (Paris, Delalain l'Aîné, 1787), iv.

were facing in Châlons. Convinced that these problems were not unique to Champagne, they encouraged competitors to offer instead of polished essays personal accounts of conditions in their towns and village and detailed plans of the reforms they would like to see introduced by a Crown solicitous of popular happiness.

The Châlons academicians were themselves inexperienced in the fine art of judging an academic essay. But by informing potential competitors that the Châlons society intended to allow them 'une liberté entière de soutenir leurs systèmes particuliers', the new academicians put into practice their conviction that it was through the 'choc des idées' that their society would be able to discover new ways of assessing and tackling these problems which could then be passed on to the government. Although the essays they received from the public might not conform to academic norms nor confirm the roseate reports reaching the Crown from those writing about France from privileged ease, their essays would have the advantage of being informed by those often most directly involved in meeting these problems locally. And inclusive assessment of all the views submitted to it would give the Academy the widest possible basis for understanding both public moods and social, economic and fiscal conditions in the country and so would enable it, in drawing up the résumés of its contest essays, to supply Louis XVI and his reforming ministers with a survey of information and opinion which might be useful in their resolution of these problems. The task was, they believed, an urgent one because if unresolved these problems could thwart public happiness and ultimately threaten the well-being of all Frenchmen.

In a century of enlightenment the Châlons Academy seems therefore to have decided that its most useful contribution would be, in its words, to 'multiplier les rayons' by acting as a converging lens through which the insights of Frenchmen from across the spectrum would pass on their way to

the throne. Though focused and directed by the Academy and its questions, the vision of society emerging from the essays would thus be that of a literate public whose views were otherwise unavailable to those seeking to guide the nation. This appears to be how the Châlons academicians understood their role as members of a royal society. Their optimism and their understanding of the government's willingness to listen to informed opinion seem to have been traits they also shared with those who competed in their contests. The number and the content of the essays submitted for their competitions demonstrate that the Academy's confidence in the willingness of other literate Frenchmen actively to contribute to the momentum of public support for reform was not misplaced.

As other academies were discovering to their loss, the public outside the academies was not interested in the literary or scientific preoccupations of the cultural elite; the focus of those outside these golden circles was for the most part on the everyday, local problems of social and economic life and on the influence that France's laws and institutions and changes in these and in government policy were having or might have on their lives. The Châlons Academy vastly enlarged its constituency by electing to use its annual essay competitions to provoke public consideration of some of the most vexing social, economic and political problems of the day. The questions they posed enabled not only an enlightened elite who understood the limitations of 'academic' discourse to write for their contests; they also encouraged literate Frenchmen who, Mornet tells us, were motivated less by the 'diffusion des lumières' than by the 'diffusion des inquiétudes' to think and write about what was happening to and around them early in the reign of Louis XVI.⁹ The

⁹ Mornet, Les Origines intellectuelles de la Révolution française, p. 473.

anxious optimism of the France that these men knew best would seem to have been one that most academics would have preferred to avoid.

But if this is true, why did the Academy at Châlons-sur-Marne serve, apparently willingly, as a forum for the discussion of topics in the main unpopular with polite society and the government that reigned over it? If it is true, as the evidence seems to suggest, that from the outset the intention of this minor provincial academy was to provide a forum in which thoughtful Frenchmen -- whatever their education or estate -- could offer their views on some of France's gravest social and economic problems and, through the good offices of the Academy's publications, address the Crown and others in authority with what they considered practical and useful reform solutions, then it is reasonable to inquire why this particular academy was so optimistic about reform and why it had such confidence in the willingness of the government to listen to its views.

The answer to these questions is complicated and involves a unique and fortuitous combination of factors which refuse to fit established patterns of academic or official behaviour. In Châlons-sur-Marne in the late seventies and early eighties we discover a unique conjuncture of persons, place and time which worked together to create extraordinary circumstances and events which by all accounts should never have occurred at all under the Old Regime. Indeed, the Academy at Châlons was only permitted a very brief appearance on France's national stage before first the Crown and then the Revolution altered the whole nature of political discourse and the role assigned the various bodies and individuals in that society. But the Academy's history predated its public contests by over a quarter of a century and during this period as a literary society as much as in the years it flourished as a royal academy we are able to glimpse in its members, their activities and in their relationship to the public and to

senior officials of the Crown an explanation for the reformist optimism which distinguished the concerns of the Châlons Academy and its conduct of its public essay competitions from those of other academic bodies. The history of Châlons's learned societies, as much as the essays they received from the literate public, grant us precise and personal access to the process whereby literate Frenchmen born under absolute monarchy gradually came to believe that they were citizen subjects of an enlightened reforming king.

To understand the radical optimism of the Châlons academicians and why as members of an official royal body they dared to use their annual prize essay contests to pose controversial subjects for public discussion, we must begin at the beginning with a brief history of the provincials who initially began meeting together in what would become, first, the Société littéraire of Châlons-sur-Marne and then, eventually, its royal academy. This established we will consider the social and economic context of poverty in Champagne in order to discover an explanation as to why the members of this privileged body seem to have felt themselves almost compelled to focus their attention specifically on the problems, the plight and the prospects of ordinary men and women. These considerations will in turn lead us to examine the relationship that the members of this learned society enjoyed with the reforming intendant of Champagne and through him with the movement for reform and the enlightened government officials guiding it. Only then can we begin to understand how the Châlons Academy briefly became a national and even an international forum for the views of a France well outside privileged bodies like the academies, and why, too, the academicians in Châlons seem to have identified their interests and the fate of the rest of the nation with the plight of France's indigent and labouring people.

THE ENLIGHTENED NOTABLES OF CHÂLONS'S LEARNED SOCIETIES

The circle of savants who founded Châlons's first permanent literary society initially met for learned discussions in 1750. Like the assemblies of what in the seventeenth century had become the Académie Française, the meetings of what would become the royal academy at Châlons-sur-Marne began with modest but regular gatherings in a private home, the residence of a former Parisian called Dupré d'Aulnay, who had settled in Châlons while serving the Crown as commissaire des guerres et directeur général de l'administration des vivres. Dupré d'Aulnay's responsibilities as a Crown administrator had involved him not only in the practical problems related to the provision of supplies and lodging for royal troops in the province but also in the surveillance (policing) of their activities and the effect their presence had on the civilian population. These responsibilities had given him both broad and detailed knowledge of the province and town and of its resources and citizenry and brought him into contact with the handful of like-minded Châlonnais whom he first invited to his home to pursue with him a fascination with science and with using systematically-compiled information to solve practical human problems.

Dupré d'Aulnay was the perfect model of an eighteenth-century government bureaucrat; his principal published work, a Traité des subsistances militaires (1744), was a highly-prized manual for administrators in his field based on his thirty years experience supplying Crown troops; his other writings also demonstrated their author's earnestness in the pursuit of the Crown's mission for savants of using technical and scientific knowledge for social utilitarian and administrative ends. The year before the first meetings of what would become the Châlons literary society he had, for example, published a treatise on the best way to conduct blood transfusions and he had already

published a study of the 'causes physiques de l'électricité'.¹⁰ These interests he shared with another Châlonnais, the doctor Pierre Navier, who was among the five men Dupré d'Aulnay first invited to the gatherings which soon became a focus for local savants in a town devoid of any academic tradition. Two other government officials, Pierre Fradet and Nicolas Culoteau, were also early habitués of these meetings. Fradet was a trained lawyer and correspondent of the Société de l'agriculture et l'industrie who brought to the assemblies his particular interest in both local history and the introduction of the latest agricultural techniques into the province; he also provided an important connection to provincial administration through his work as secretary to the Intendant of Champagne, Barberie de Saint-Contest, who early took more than a passing interest in the society. Nicolas Culoteau was avocat du roi in the presidial court of Châlons; like Navier this Crown lawyer had won recognition from a Paris academy for work directly related to his professional activities and, like the abbé Beschefer, the fourth member of the new society and a canon at the cathedral, he was interested in the history of the region and the development (and decline) of its agriculture and commerce. The sixth Châlonnais to attend these gatherings was the Chevalier de la Touche, a painter and engraver of some reputation who had worked on the decoration of public buildings both in Reims and Châlons. He, like the abbé Beschefer, was from an old noble family in the region.

¹⁰ On Dupré d'Aulnay see AD Marne I J 195 and Menu, La Société littéraire, pp. 9 and 74 as well as Michaud, Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne (Paris, Michaud Frères, 1811-1862), XII, 49 [henceforth abbreviated Michaud] and Didot, Nouvelle biographie générale (Paris, Firmin Didot Frères, 1852-1866), XV, 364-65 [henceforth abbreviated Didot]. For a recent review of the relationship between science and state administrators in pre-revolutionary France see Keith Baker's 'Science and Politics at the End of the Old Regime', chapter 7 of his Inventing the French Revolution (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 152-66.

Three of the group's six original members thus had professional links with the Crown's national or regional administration; and the other three, the doctor, the canon and the engraver, had links to Châlons's municipal authorities: Beschefer was an active member of the administrative boards of the town's hospital and collège; La Touche undertook artistic commissions for the cathedral and the municipal council; and Navier served in an advisory capacity to the council on matters of public health. This pattern in membership was to prevail throughout the society's history for, unlike earlier academic societies, many of which were dominated by an aristocracy of prelates and leisured seigneurs or by senior magistrates in the provincial parlements, the Châlons society was founded and flourished with a membership composed essentially of ecclesiastical and government administrators and officials and those in the professions with links to local government.¹¹

¹¹ On Culoteau see AD Marne I J 207 and Menu, 'La Société littéraire', p. 10; on Fradet AD Marne I J 8 and 195 and Menu, pp. 10, 19 and 21; on Beschefer AD Marne I J 195 and 208 and Bibliothèque municipale de Reims MS 1551; on La Touche AD Marne I J 201 and 209 and Maurice Poinsignon, Histoire générale de la Champagne et de la Brie, 2^{ème} ed. 3 vols (Châlons-sur-Marne, Martin Frères, 1898), III, 476; on Navier AD Marne I J 195 and 208, Pierre Larousse, Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIX^e siècle, 16 vols (Paris, Administration du Grand Dictionnaire universel, 1866-1878), XI, 876 [henceforth abbreviated Larousse] and Didot, XXXVI, 545-46.

Three of the original six men in the Châlons society had university degrees and four of them had or would see their work in print; but it was the doctor, Navier, who was the most intellectually eminent and who would first bring the Châlons society to the attention of the Paris academic community. Only thirty-eight when he first began attending these gatherings, Navier was already a highly respected local doctor known for his dedication to patients rich and poor both in Châlons itself and in the surrounding countryside. To this work and to the papers he presented to his fellow savants in Châlons's learned society Navier brought the fruit of his considerable analytical abilities, producing studies on local and regional epidemics which he read to his fellow savants in Châlons before submitting them for consideration by the Paris Academy of Sciences. He was also a dedicated clinical scientist who would make several important chemical discoveries, including the discovery of nitric acid and a whole range of antidotes for poisons. Although his social background was perhaps the most modest of the society's earliest members -- he was, according to a contemporary, 'issu d'une famille peu aisée' -- Navier was not only a prominent member of the Châlons society but throughout his life an active

Bound together by a shared enthusiasm for the latest scientific techniques and practices and by lives rooted in the activities they exercised in and for public authorities in Châlons and its hinterland, the doctor, the cleric, the artist engraver and the three Crown officials also shared a common commitment to work for the public good which enabled them to transcend the obvious social and economic differences separating them and to make of their weekly gatherings a genuine manifestation of the Republic of Letters. The diversity of their professional experience and the contact this had given them to a cross-section of the population seem to have been central to their discussions and activities and to the desire they shared to use their working knowledge of social and economic conditions in Châlons and its environs and their interest in the latest agricultural or technical innovations to contribute to the social welfare and economic prospects of those who lived there. And although the pattern of membership in the society would gradually evolve over the next forty years towards one in which members of the Third Estate -- particularly those involved in public administration -- represented a significant majority, the focus on practical, social utilitarian inquiries which marked these earliest meetings of the Châlons society would be constant.

correspondent of the Academy of Sciences in Paris, which would include many of his research papers among its official publications; his work also appeared in the Gazette de Médecine. For the next quarter century Navier would work to use his science and his place in the Châlons learned society to promote public health and improve the lot of the people of his town and region. At the same time his research brought the work of the Châlons society to the attention of prominent members of the national and international scientific community who would subsequently represent the Academy's interests in Paris as a direct consequence of their admiration for this Châlons doctor. Just before his death in 1779 Navier was awarded a pension by Louis XVI in recognition of his medical and scientific contribution. The 'Éloge' for Navier which appeared in the Recueil de la Société royale de médecine for that year was by that society's founder Vicq d'Azyr, who remained a faithful correspondent and supporter of the Châlons society.

By 1752 the private meetings of the six had begun to arouse interest among other Châlonnais, primarily among those involved in regional or local administration for the Crown or municipality and among the town's doctors, lawyers and teachers in the collèges. And so, fully cognizant 'que toute association ou assemblée ne peut subsister qu'autant qu'elle est autorisée par le gouvernement', the original group of savants used the good offices of Dupré d'Aulnay and Fradet to approach the provincial Intendant, Barberie de Saint-Contest, and the military governor of Champagne, the Comte de Clermont, with a request for official sanction for meetings to which they hoped to invite other interested parties.¹² With their support Dupré d'Aulnay then petitioned the minister of state Saint-Florentin for formal approval from the Crown for their assemblies and in early 1753 the society received word that the minister was willing to give his authorization for their activities. He also offered the Châlonnais hope that 'lorsque cette société aurait produit le fruit d'une utilité constante, pendant quelques années, peut-être sa Majesté lui accorderait des lettres patentes de confirmation [as a royal academy]'.¹³

The men from Châlons lost no time. Within a month the now official Châlons Société littéraire began inviting new 'associés' to attend meetings and within six they had drawn up rules that guaranteed those who spoke in their assemblies an entire liberty in the subjects they discussed and confidentiality for all views they expressed. Although still meeting in the home of Dupré d'Aulnay, the original members now welcomed a whole

¹² The phrase is taken from the Academy's official account of its prehistory which chronicles the earliest meetings of the society and its dealings with the government. Drawn up by the Academy's first officers as part of the request they prepared for Crown ministers in 1777 to justify the Academy's request for an annual government subsidy to underwrite its activities as a royal body, this history is transcribed in AD Marne C 1768.

¹³ Letter dated 29 January 1753 transcribed in Ibid.

succession of new adherents to their gatherings and, almost inevitably in a town whose main business was government, officials directly involved in public administration made up a significant proportion of these new members. The original six were joined by two conseillers from Châlons's presidial and bailliage court, by a président trésorier from the bureau des finances, by the president of the élection (the administrative and judicial court responsible for assessing and collecting the taille and other direct taxes), by a receveur for the bureau général du tabac, and by two engineers in the provincial Ponts et chaussées. Joining them from the professions were another doctor and two more lawyers, one of whom, as greffier-secrétaire to the Châlons city council, would prove a useful connection for the society to municipal government. The only other new member was a parish priest who was passionately interested in the history of the Châlons region. Although he would for the rest of his life remain in the area serving as a simple parish priest to a village community just outside Châlons and popularizing Champagne's history, along with accounts of the society's activities, in local almanacs, in the literary society he sat alongside seigneurs and senior magistrates who, perhaps not surprisingly for a society whose concerns and activities were so rooted in Châlons and its hinterland, elected him, a country vicar committed to his parish and its people, the first secretary of their society.¹⁴

By 1755 numbers had grown so large that the society's meetings could no longer be accommodated by Dupré d'Aulnay and so late that year the society again petitioned Saint-Florentin, requesting that members be allowed to move their weekly meetings to Châlons's Hôtel de ville. They also asked for permission to organize annual or even semi-annual public

¹⁴ See 'Notes sur l'abbé Suicer' in Juste Berland, Table générale alphabétique des travaux de l'ancienne académie de Châlons (Châlons-sur-Marne, C. O'Toole, 1904), p. 463.

meetings that would enable the society to 'manifester son existence et [...] faire connoître que ses members occupent utilement'.¹⁵ Accustomed to playing an active role within the various administrative or professional bodies of which they were members, these savants wanted to gain access to a larger public and were committed to putting the results of their scientific and technical inquiries and the knowledge that came from their own practical and professional experience in their town and province to the general good and public use. This they would do by propagating information and practices designed to increase agricultural productivity, promote manufacturing and encourage experiments with new crops, breeds or industrial techniques -- all goals which received the full endorsement of provincial authorities. Early in 1756 Saint-Florentin granted the society this new favour and members moved their meetings to the town hall where henceforth a now official roster of members was allowed to gather late each Wednesday afternoon to pursue their learned discussions.

Within the next few years the literary society welcomed yet more adherents, broadening its resident membership to include more men from all three estates. From the nobility were added two seigneurs, one of whom was a member of the new Société d'Agriculture which Bertin had recently founded in Paris and a prominent agronomist who worked closely with Champagne's new Intendant, Rouillé d'Orfeuil, in the propagation of new agricultural techniques and initiatives; also from the nobility was another senior magistrate in the Châlons bureau des finances who was soon to be named lieutenant du roi et de la ville, an office which gave him important responsibilities in the policing of food supplies, the maintenance of public order and the supervision of local artisans and apprentices, and

¹⁵ AD Marne C 1768 - Extrait des registres de délibérations de l'Académie [...] du mai 1777.

which encapsulated many of the social and economic concerns of those sitting with him in the Châlons learned society. New members from the Third Estate included another, but much lower ranking, member of the municipal council, who would serve for the next thirty years as an administrator and almoner in Châlons's hospital and hospices where he would have encountered another new member, the Châlons society's third local doctor. New members from the First Estate included another parish priest and, much more significantly, the abbé Malvaux, a Champenois who was vicar-general to Châlons's bishop. Despite his rank and title Malvaux, like the parish priest, had been born into humble circumstance and these origins seem to have coloured his attitudes and activities throughout a long and successful career in the upper reaches of ecclesiastical administration and as an indefatigable member first of the literary and then the academic society in Châlons. From the time he was asked to join the literary society, soon after his appointment as vicar-general, Malvaux formed an easy if unusual working partnership with another new member, the teacher François Sabbathier who had recently joined the staff of one of Châlons's two collèges.¹⁶

Twenty-six men in all sat as resident members of the Châlons literary society over the course of the quarter century in which it functioned as a recognized body striving to gain the more influential status of a royal academy. Many of these same men would still be members of the society when

¹⁶ The list of resident members of the literary society has been compiled from six sources: a roster of members drawn up by the society's first secretary, the abbé Suicer, in 1756 and published in the almanac Tablettes topographiques, physiques et historiques du diocèse de Châlons-sur-Marne (Châlons, 1758); a hand-written list, apparently taken from La France littéraire and appended by the society's first historian, Henri Menu, to a copy of his history of the Academy; and from three volumes of La France littéraire, for the years 1758, 1759 and 1769. These names were then compared and supplemented by those appearing in the academicians' account of the society's activities and found in AD Marne I J 195.

it became an academy and a central core would remain active members throughout most of Louis XVI's reign as well. But none were more crucial to the success of the two bodies nor more central in shaping the orientation and drive of their activities than the unlikely pair the abbé Malvaux and François Sabbathier, one a cleric who, despite his humble origins in the province and in the Third Estate, would eventually rise to become Vicar-General to the Archbishop of Paris, and the other a teacher who, despite early international success in the academic world, had both feet firmly planted in the region and the Third Estate. Malvaux's background and contribution will be considered in greater detail when we survey the place of ecclesiastics in Châlons's academic society and his work on the essays the Academy received on the begging poor; but it is perhaps useful here to consider the emergence of the extraordinary Sabbathier onto the municipal and academic scene in Châlons.

François Sabbathier was a most improbably figure to become, as he did in the 1770s, permanent secretary of a learned society, if such societies are regarded as genteel cultural centres where a fierce entrepreneurial spirit was still stranger. Like several others who would become his colleagues in the Châlons society, Sabbathier's parents were of modest means. He nevertheless received an excellent education from the Oratorians and first made his living by taking private pupils until, in 1762, he secured a post as 'professeur au 3^{eme}' at the collège in Châlons. He was to remain in this post for the next sixteen years, but just as he embarked on his first year of teaching in the school, the ambitious and confident Sabbathier was also completing an 'Essai historique et critique sur l'origine et la puissance temporelle des papes', which in 1763 won a prize from the Academy of Berlin and brought the young schoolmaster to the attention of the kings of Prussia and Sweden, both of whom wrote him

letters of praise for his essay, and of the duc de Choiseul, who henceforth took particular interest in the essayist and in the activities of the Châlons learned society. Sabbathier's essay for the Berlin Academy was published in 1764 and shortly thereafter the members of the Châlons society asked the teacher to join them in their meetings.

For the next few years the enterprising Sabbathier devoted himself to his teaching, to the literary society, and to making money. He composed or compiled a whole series of reference works and textbooks for the schools market: the largest and longest-running a money-spinner of thirty-seven volumes called Dictionnaire pour l'intelligence des auteurs classiques, grecs et latins, which he published from Châlons over the next half-century (1766-1815), a Manuel des enfants ou Maximes pour servir à l'éducation de la jeunesse (1769), a Recueil des dissertations sur divers sujets de l'histoire de France (1770) and the two-volume Exercices du corps chez les anciens pour servir de l'éducation à la jeunesse (1772). Sabbathier's books sold well and by 1773 he had amassed enough money and contacts to be able to set up a riverside paper factory in a hamlet outside Châlons. In preparation for this venture, he persuaded a pair of brothers in the region to teach him the mechanics of paper manufacture and then exploited the contacts he had made through the literary society with the provincial intendant, Rouillé d'Orfeuil, to obtain a monopoly for 'la fourniture du papier employé dans les bureaux de la régie des aides' up to the value of 5,000 livres per year. It looked as if Sabbathier's fortune was made and for some years his business thrived, but the paper factory fell on hard times when the brothers who had taught him the trade sued him before the Intendant for breach of confidence. Given the Intendant's sympathy for a figure who was emerging as an ever more significant member of the learned society whose activities the Intendant favoured, the brothers' protest fell

on deaf ears. Yet in the years that followed Sabbathier's factory declined and by the Revolution the academician had gone bankrupt.¹⁷

Much of Sabbathier's entrepreneurial activity was carried on in tandem with his teaching, his increasing responsibilities in the Châlons learned society, and his growing international reputation as a writer and academician; he was by this time also a corresponding member of the Academy in Berlin, of the Royal Society of Sciences and Letters of Göteborg in Sweden, and of the Académie étrusque de Cortone. Sabbathier's initiative and intelligence placed him at the very heart of all the activities of the Châlons literary society as it would those of the Academy. His dynamism, coupled with the determination and devotion of Malvaux, were crucial to the public success of Châlons's learned society and, equally importantly, they were crucial to the society's relationship with important figures both in and outside government. It was, for example, Sabbathier who with the abbé Malvaux and Dr Navier first approached the provincial intendant asking for funds for their learned society and it was they who, on the Intendant's advice, drew up the account of the society's history and activities which they then presented to the Controller General at Versailles in 1777 to obtain government funding for the activities of the new crown academy. This was only the first of several visits to court which Sabbathier and Malvaux would make as

¹⁷ As a teacher in Châlons Sabbathier received a salary of 1,000 livres, but by 1785 he was paying 15 livres in capitation, which was between 2½ and 3 times more than any other Châlons educator. Archives municipales CC 77. In 1795 the Convention voted to give him a 'secours' of 3,000 francs and he was made an 'associé' of the Institut. See AD Marne C 1768 and I J 2, I J 195 and I J 209 as well as Lhote, Biographie chalonnaise avec documents inédits and Larousse, XIV, 8. I am grateful for much of the detail on Sabbathier's economic circumstances to the research of Mme Danielle Nicoud, formerly of the departmental archives in Châlons. My account of the rise and fall of his paper factory at Ecury-sur-Coole is drawn from Eugène Creveaux's, Les Anciennes Papeteries de la Marne (Grenoble, Le Papier, 1936), pp. 17-18. See, too, AD Marne C 464 - Requête des frères Bession contre Sabbathier.

representatives of the Academy, delegations which would involve audiences not only with Necker and Vergennes but also with the Keeper of the Seals Miromesnil. But these official -- and often frustrating -- occasions were merely one aspect of the work these men did for Châlons's learned society. It was, for example, Sabbathier who maintained the official register of its proceedings and decisions, a register which, once the society had become an academy, the Crown could inspect without warning at any time; and it was he, too, who took care of practical details like organizing the society's public meetings, even setting out the chairs, and, since he was the society's treasurer as well, making arrangements for its loans.

However, the most important contribution which Sabbathier would make to the work and reputation of the society once it became an academy was his diligence as its chief correspondent with all the other literary, agricultural and academic societies as well as the private individuals who wrote to solicit its views or advice or to submit scientific, philosophical, philological or archeological works for its judgment (at times in order to have Sabbathier's own personal views on their content or style) or, most significantly, to make inquiries or submit essays for the Academy's public essay competitions. Sabbathier also consistently traded on his own academic contacts on the international scene to enhance the Châlons society's reputation and influence and used carefully cultivated links with powerful men like Bertin, d'Orfeuil and the duc de Choiseul to obtain funding for prizes which the Academy's own relative penury prevented it from financing itself. His capacity for hard work, his faithfulness and persistence in the onerous task of correspondence built for the Châlons society an important network of contacts and support at the same time that it established an invaluable archive through which both the history of this

academy and of the circulation of enlightened or reformist ideas can be traced.¹⁸

Sabbathier, like the abbé Malvaux, persistently pursued the advancement of the Academy and was fearless before the most senior government ministers, as well as being alternately flattering and forceful before the more sympathetic Rouillé d'Orfeuil when, for example, the Intendant was late in authorizing the Academy's annual subsidy. His intelligence and drive made him an ideal complement to the dedicated and hard-working humanitarianism of the faithful abbé Malvaux. The latter's social vision and devotion to the work of the Academy were remarkable, prompting the powerful (including his own immediate superior in Châlons who would become the Archbishop of Paris) and the public seriously to consider what could be done to relieve the suffering of the indigent, reduce unnecessary burdens on ordinary working people, and improve their economic and educational prospects. This work spanned his years in Châlons and continued after he had moved to Paris. Like Sabbathier in Châlons, Malvaux first there and then in Paris worked unceasingly to further the cause of reform and the reputation of the Châlons society both in its early days as a literary society and later as a royal academy.

It should be stressed that Malvaux, Sabbathier and the twenty-four other men who along with them played an active role as resident members of the Châlons Société littéraire during some or all of the quarter century of its existence were drawn in the main not from the ranks of a leisured upper clergy or nobility; unusually for those working towards academic status, these twenty-six men were actively involved in the administration of Crown business locally or in the region, in municipal government, in the

¹⁸ Sabbathier's account of Academy proceedings is contained in AD Marne I J 195; his correspondence is scattered throughout the whole of the Academy's archive, but most especially I J 35 - 55 and 208 - 210.

professions or as secular clergy with substantial responsibilities in the diocese or local parishes. Of the ten members who came from the First and Second Estates, only four were from the old nobility. Three of the four clerics had their origins in the Third Estate and the three officers in the bureau des finances had either been ennobled or were being ennobled in that office. The other sixteen, or nearly two-thirds of the membership, were from and would remain part of the Third Estate. But, whatever their place in the social hierarchy, the majority of these twenty-six men were by occupation involved in the government of public affairs in Châlons, either directly through senior or minor office in the Crown courts or tax offices or indirectly as town councillors in a municipal government increasingly dominated by Crown influence,¹⁹ or as professionals serving, at least part of the time, in some formal capacity on Crown business.²⁰

¹⁹ On the use the Crown, through its Intendants, made of municipal officials by its delegation to them of tasks like levying and collecting taxes, billeting troops, and supervising royal corvées, see Nora Temple, 'Municipal Elections and Municipal Oligarchies in Eighteenth-Century France' in Bosher, ed., French Government and Society, pp. 70-91.

On the particular make-up of the Châlons council and the government-led transition in Châlons towards a council dominated by members of the Third Estate (an edict of 1765 stipulated that only one of the fourteen notables on the council could come from an ecclesiastical chapter, one from the clergy, one from the nobility; the rest were to come from the Third Estate) see Poinson, Histoire, III, 343-54. Nora Temple reports that in Châlons in this period the échevinage went to lesser office-holders, lawyers and merchants, with seats allocated so that the first échevin was to go to an avocat, the second to a procureur, the third to a bourgeois, and the fourth to a merchant. Ibid., p. 79.

²⁰ On the use Champagne's Intendant Rouillé d'Orfeuil made of Châlons's doctors, engineers, curés and municipal officials to advise on and supervise Crown-funded ateliers de charité and dépôts de mendicité in the province see William J. Olejniczak, 'Power over the Body: The Ateliers de Charité in Late Eighteenth-Century Champagne', a paper presented to the Thirty-Third Annual Conference of the Society for French Historical Studies at the University of Michigan, 20 March 1987. From the early 1770s the curés who were member of the society were being asked to draw up a list of able-bodied poor to work on Châlons's two ateliers de charité, while inspectors and engineers from the Ponts et chaussées surveyed potential sites for road or canal work in order to provide the government with estimates of the costs of equipment and labour. Local doctors like Charles Maupoint, who became a member of the literary society in the 1760s, were

This pattern of membership was to remain essentially the same when the literary society became an academy. The consistency was due in part to the fact that titular members in the Châlons Academy, limited by the Crown's letters-patent to twenty, were drawn in the first instance from those who had belonged to the literary society; these new academicians ceased to be members only when their professional activities called them away from the province (as was the case, for example, with one of the royal engineers; with Malvaux who moved to Paris to become Vicar General to Le Clerc de Juigné, when he became Archbishop of Paris; and with one of the teachers who was among the first new members of the Academy) or when they became too old or infirm to attend meetings.²¹ But the continuity in the social and professional origins of those member of the society was also due to the social, economic, administrative and intellectual make-up of the town and the practical and utilitarian focus of the society's concerns throughout its history.

also asked by the Intendant to lend their professional expertise to the tasks of supervising the public ateliers, providing the government, as did Maupoint in 1775, with written reports on matters relating to disease and public health; in one of the projects described by Olejniczak, Maupoint was asked to inspect an atelier on which the poor were being paid to clear stagnant cesspools in the nearby town of Suippes. See AD Marne C 1728, 'Mémoire de Maupoint, médecin de Châlons-sur-Marne', August 1775, cited in Olejniczak, pp. 6 and 10. I am indebted to Dr Olejniczak for providing me with a typescript of this paper.

²¹ Arguing against the notion that social status was a primary consideration in the inclusion or exclusion of members in this academy is the fact that of those from the literary society available for membership when the Academy considered who should be included among its twenty titular members, the noble Bocquet d'Antenay, who was président trésorier in Châlons's bureau des finances, was excluded whereas the doctors Navier and Gellée, the parish priest Roussel and the almoner and municipal counsellor Delestrée were all included. Bocquet d'Antenay did not become a member until 1778 when, on the death of the academician and presidial counsellor Lorrain de Beuville, he petitioned the society for membership on the grounds that as a member of the literary society he had 'un droit légitime à cette place'. AD Marne I J 195 - deliberations for 7 January 1778.

Unlike the neighbouring towns of Reims and Troyes, where polite society was animated by the presence of many nobles (Reims) and/or wealthy manufacturers (Reims and Troyes) or the presence of a renowned university faculty (Reims), Châlons was neither a rich town nor one in which a landed nobility was resident in any numbers; agriculture in the surrounding region was poor and there was no significant manufacturing sector.²² Nor does Châlons seem to have supported a substantial book trade; a mere handful of booksellers were all that its literate population, its two collèges and its bureaucratic officer corps could support.²³ In Châlons it was the généralité's administrative, technical and fiscal officials along with the town's municipal officers, its doctors and lawyers and those serving in its cathedral, courts and collèges who dominated society. Châlons was the administrative centre and residence of Champagne's intendant, the chef-lieu of a generality of twelve élections, seat of a bailliage and presidial court as well as administrative and fiscal courts like the bureau des finances and a grenier à sel.²⁴ While it was from these bodies that a large percentage of the society's members would consistently be drawn, the Academy, like the literary society, also welcomed a smaller but significant number of clerics, whose presence reflected the relatively large number of churchmen in a town which, like Reims, was the seat of a bishop. Of 13,187

²² So near to Paris that those with the means to spend their leisure there were unlikely to want to be resident in Châlons, the seat of Champagne's intendancy does not seem to have boasted a significant number of landed seigneurs among its citizens, despite Rouillé d'Orfeuil's efforts to construct magnificent buildings and enhance public amenities in the town as well as promote its academic society. On the size and nature of the noble and manufacturing and merchant populations in Reims and Troyes and on the university in Reims see Lynn Avery Hunt, Revolution and Urban Politics in Provincial France: Troyes and Reims, 1786-1790 (Stanford University Press, 1978), pp. 9-37.

²³ Poinsignon, Histoire, III, 407.

²⁴ See Ed. de Barthelemy, Histoire de la Ville de Châlons-sur-Marne depuis son origine jusqu'en 1789 (Châlons-sur-Marne, Laurent, 1854).

people of all ranks living in Châlons in 1790, 282 were clerics divided between eleven religious houses and eleven parishes; but here, too, the pattern of function and activity among society members was consistent with the social utilitarian ethos emerging from this learned society for all the ecclesiastics in the Châlons Academy were exclusively secular in function.²⁵

Over its fourteen-year history as a royal society, the Châlons Academy named thirty-three men as titular members. Of these thirty-two have been identified socially and, if classified strictly according to their place in a hierarchy defined only by estate, nine would be counted as belonging to the First Estate, four to the Second, and nineteen to the Third.²⁶ The privileged orders would thus appear to have contributed 13, or 40.6%, of the Academy's thirty-two socially identified titular members. However, if we analyze the social origins and the professional activities of the nine men classified as belonging to the First Estate (28% of the total identified) we discover, just as we did in surveying the complex social, economic and professional functions of the Academy's permanent secretary Sabbathier, yet another example of the dangers involved in over-facile

²⁵ Archives municipales F1 for Châlons's population figures, cited in Roger Bouffet, 'La Vie municipale à Châlons-sur-Marne sous l'Assemblée constituante', Mémoire pour le diplôme d'études supérieures, 1921, p. 21. On its ecclesiastics see Louis Barbat, Histoire de la Ville de Châlons-sur-Marne, (Châlons-sur-Marne, 1855), p. 400.

²⁶ Unfortunately, although I have the name of the thirty-third titular member of the Academy, I have not yet been able positively to determine whether he should be counted as belonging to the Second or the Third Estate. Described in documents dating from the Empire as a 'propriétaire et membre du jury d'instruction de l'École centrale', this member was also the editor of an Almanach Champenois which a contemporary described as being written in a 'style gai, approprié à la classe qu'il a particulièrement en vue', that is 'à la portée des cultivateurs les moins instruits'. Its purpose, to supply 'excellentes préceptes d'agriculture et d'économie rurale et domestique', was consistent with the concerns being addressed by the Société d'Agriculture of Châlons, the learned society which succeeded the Châlons Academy in 1798 and to which he also belonged. AD Marne I J 195, 196, 197 and 209.

assumptions about either the social backgrounds or the reasons for social cohesion of academics categorized with regard to their estate alone.

Of the nine clerics in the Châlons Academy only the abbé Beschefer came from an old noble family,²⁷ whereas the other eight churchmen in the society had their origins in the Third Estate.²⁸ Drawn exclusively from the town's secular clergy the nine included two diocesan administrators working at the most senior level, the abbé Malvaux and the abbé Boulogne, each of whom would serve as Vicar General to a Châlons bishop, and three canons from the cathedral, the abbés Beschefer, Michel and Delacourt. Only the abbé Michel would serve the cathedral as such throughout his years as member of the Châlons Academy, but even he was not content simply to stand and pray for not only did he anonymously submit essays for the Academy's competitions on reform of the corvée and of popular education, he is also known to have had links with the abbé de Veri, confidant and counsellor to, among others, Maurepas, Turgot, Malesherbes and Vergennes. The abbé Beschefer, who had been a founding member of both the literary and academic societies, became the society's director in 1782; but he, too, eventually joined the ranks of those exercising senior responsibilities in the administration of the Church's temporal affairs in the diocese, especially in its schools and hospitals, for, when his fellow-academician the abbé Boulogne ceased to be vicar-general to the bishop of Châlons and took up responsibilities in Paris, it was Beschefer who took his place in Châlons. Beschefer's fellow canon the abbé Delacourt, throughout his long association with the Châlons learned society, functioned less as a cleric

²⁷ Revue de Champagne, XIX (1885), 69-71.

²⁸ In his 'Éloge' to the abbé Malvaux in 1790, his fellow academician the abbé Delacourt noted that 'une humble chaumière le vit naître' adding, 'dénué de ressources et d'appui, il [Malvaux] fut lui-même le créateur de sa gloire'. AD Marne C 1768.

than as a judicial official. Having divided his time at university between law and theology, Delacourt spent the whole of his public life as conseiller clerc either in Châlons's bailliage and presidial court or for four years in Maupeou's conseil supérieur returning, when parlement reclaimed its jurisdiction, to the bailliage court where he served until becoming, during the Revolution, president of the justice de paix and, when that too was suppressed, a judge on the civil court established in Châlons, a post in which he was to remain until his resignation in 1816 at the age of eighty-six. Although he was a priest, this abbé's passion was the law and law reform; he was a recognized authority on the subject and master-minded three public essay competitions on legal and judicial reform held under the Academy's auspices in 1780, 1781 and 1782 and provided an important link between the Academy and legal reformers like Élie de Beaumont and future revolutionaries like Brissot de Warville.

Delacourt, Malvaux, Beschefer, and the curé Camuset, another ecclesiastical member of the Academy, were all also actively involved in the provision of public relief in Châlons either as advisors to the municipality's ateliers de charité, administrators or almoners in Châlons hospitals and hospices, or as founder members of its bureau de charité; Delacourt was particularly active in all these endeavours. Camuset served as priest to the sick and foundlings of Châlons's hôtel Dieu as well as sous-maître at the collège, an institution where he served under his fellow academicians and clerics the abbés Lescurie and Menard, successively professors and principals of the collège, on whose administrative board the abbé Beschefer also sat. The last clerical member of the Academy was the parish priest Roussel who, like Beschefer and Delacourt, had also been a member of the literary society. Born in Vitry of 'parents dépourvus de fortune', Roussel owed his position in the society to intellectual gifts

which had manifested themselves while he was still a schoolboy; his intellectual promise had prompted a bailliage magistrate in Vitry to pay for his education and, armed with this and his firm Catholic faith, Roussel became a devoted parish priest in Châlons and author of many published theological tracts and treatises as well as a valued member of the Châlons learned society. Years later his practical knowledge of the life of the poor in Champagne and his writing ability would prompt his fellow academicians to trust to him the drafting of the final version of the essays they would receive on the reform of the corvée.

The men in the Châlons Academy who were from the First Estate do not therefore seem to have taken their place there because of uniform social backgrounds nor, it would seem, because of comparable intellectual attainments. Some like Beschefer, Camuset and Boulogne were known for their literary or academic endeavours;²⁹ but for most it seems that it was for their civic work and a known commitment to the public utilitarian activities and ideals which were the hallmark of the Châlons Academy which provided entry into the Châlons learned society. Well-acquainted with one another from other activities and organizations in the town, their membership in the Academy appears for these clerics to have been yet one more aspect of lives bound up in public service to the community in which they lived.

Clerics were always to figure among the Châlons learned societies' most active and influential members, yet throughout their forty-year history, first as a literary society and then as an academy, clerics and

²⁹ For an account of the publications of these academicians see: for Beschefer, Bibliothèque municipale de Reims MS 1552, AD Marne I J 195 and Menu, La Société littéraire, pp. 37-38; for Roussel, AD Marne I J 195 and Michaud, XXXVI, 633; for Boulogne, AD Marne I J 195 and 197 and Didot, VII, 15-18.

nobles were to be outnumbered by those from the Third Estate. The percentage of members drawn from the first two estates varied little between the literary society and the Academy -- forming together 42.3% of the total membership in the former and 40.6% in the latter. But what did alter, and fairly dramatically, was the relative importance, numerically, of the first two estates in relation to one another within the two societies. In the literary society members of the First Estate represented 15.4% of the total and those from the Second 26.9%, while in the Academy clerical members represented over 28% of the total number of titular members with those from the Second Estate declining to only four or 12.5%.³⁰ Remarkably, none of those positively identified as noble in Châlons's royal society were landed seigneurs, whereas seigneurs as a group

³⁰ My analysis of the social composition of the Châlons Société littéraire and Academy differs significantly from that of Daniel Roche in his article 'Milieux académiques et provinciaux et sociétés des lumières: Bordeaux, Dijon, Châlons-sur-Marne' and in his thesis, Le Siècle des Lumières, II, 385. Without providing the names of those whose status he quantifies, Roche indicated the presence of larger numbers of members drawn from the Second Estate than I have been able to find and without names it has been impossible to compare my own findings with his. Philip Dawson has provided a clue to the discrepancy. In his book Provincial Magistrates and Revolutionary Politics in France, 1789-95 (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 117, Dawson remarks that Roche, in analyzing the social composition of the three academies, counted bailliage magistrates as noblemen and asserts that, on the contrary, in the absence of precise information about individual status these magistrates would be more correctly counted as bourgeois. Earlier in his book (p. 60) Dawson also states categorically that with the exception of the Châtelet of Paris, no court of the bailliage type received any privilege of ennoblement through office holding. My own research indicates that most of the magistrates who were member of the Châlons literary society and Academy were drawn from the Third Estate. For this reason and because the numbers in question are small (both Roche and I work from a base of a total of 33 titular members of the Academy from its letters patent until the Revolution) and the categorization of these magistrates as members of either the Second or Third Estate significantly alters their apparent statistical significance, I have chosen neither to reproduce Roche's findings nor to represent my own findings purely quantitatively. Narrative description of the occupation of members and their often complex social, economic and intellectual role in the life of their town would seem to provide a clearer and more helpful representation of the composition of membership in the learned societies of Châlons.

had made up nearly half of the noble members of its literary society. The four men from the Second Estate in the Academy were all ennobled magistrates and officials who were serving in Châlons's bureau des finances; one of them had sat as a conseiller on the Conseil supérieur in Châlons and two would serve as mayor of Châlons while members of the Academy.³¹ And so, the pattern of local or regional administrative responsibilities which characterized the activities of the Châlons academicians belonging to the First Estate seems to have characterized its members from the Second Estate as well.

In the Châlons Academy ties of professional and political allegiance to the Crown and the Intendant under whose tutelage the Academy's bureaucratic members functioned seem to have been more significant factors in the election of members than did social origins in any one estate, for nearly half of all the titular members of this Academy were servants of the Crown. The four noble academicians who sat in Châlons's bureau des finances were joined in the Academy by eleven men, drawn from the Third Estate, who were serving the Crown as magistrates or officials in lesser jurisdictions or administrative responsibilities in the town or region. These included the Intendant's secretary Heuvrard, who was also, and conveniently, Inspecteur général de la librairie for the province, and the

³¹ The four ennobled Crown officials in the Academy, each a président-trésorier in the bureau des finances, were Bocquet d'Anthenay (who had also been a conseiller in the Conseil supérieur), Parvillez and Gargan (both of whom served as mayor) and Gauthier d'Omev. Parvillez, who was Director of the Academy from 1783 to 1786, found the task of presiding as maire royal over local government, particularly the assessment of taxes and the provision of poor relief, so onerous that he asked to be excused from office in the Academy. AD Marne I J 195 - deliberations of 20 December 1786.

There is no evidence to indicate that in choosing new members the Academy's titular members adopted a deliberate policy of discrimination against seigneurs nor one in favour of members drawn from the noblesse de robe.

president of the élection Soleau, who had been a member of the Société littéraire and who from the 1770s would work directly under Rouillé d'Orfeuil and the Châlons municipal council as 'chargé des fonds destinés pour les dépenses relatives à la destruction de la mendicité'; in 1781 he would be elected an échevin to that council.³² Those in Crown service also included six officers or lawyers from the presidial court, three of whom (Lorrain de Beuville, Brémont and Le Gorlier) had been appointed by the Intendant to serve as conseillers on Châlons's Conseil supérieur and four of whom (Lorrain de Beuville, Le Gorlier, Thomas and Ouriet) would at one time or another also sit as échevins on the city council.³³ A tax official called Le Valois, who was directeur de la douane, and two royal engineers, Colluel and Le Jolivet, who would follow each other as head of engineering operations for the whole of Champagne's Ponts et chaussées, joined them in the Academy. These fifteen Crown officials -- four from the Second Estate, eleven from the Third -- made up nearly half of the total number of titular members of the Châlons Academy (reflecting the pattern laid down in the earliest meetings of the Société littéraire). Their vision of the Crown, of the work of reforming ministers, and of the practical problems and political, legal, fiscal and technical challenges of administering a poor town and province like Châlons

³² AD Marne C 1748.

³³ The six were Lorrain de Beuville, Richard, Brémont, Le Gorlier, Thomas and Ouriet. Lorrain de Beuville had been a mayoral candidate while still a member of the literary society in 1769 and Gargan replaced Le Gorlier as mayor of Châlons in early 1781; the bailliage and presidial lawyers Thomas and Ouriet were échevins on the municipal council and in 1788 would vote with fellow academician Claude Delestrée for the doubling of the Third.

For details about Rouillé d'Orfeuil's nomination of the presidial officials Le Gorlier, Brémont and Lorrain de Beuville (as well as the abbé de Lacourt) to the Maupeou Conseil supérieur see Robert Villers, L'Organisation du Parlement de Paris et des Conseils supérieurs d'après la réforme de Maupeou (1771-1774) (Paris, Jouve, 1937), pp. 159-62.

in Champagne as well as their contacts with the royal Intendant Rouillé d'Orfeuill were to exert a powerful influence on the questions addressed by the Châlons Academy and its essay public: in any vote of the Academy and any panel of judges for its essay contests theirs was a significant presence.³⁴ A final member drawn from the ranks of those involved in public administration was Claude Delestrée; although he was not by profession a Crown official, he was an administrator of the town's hospitals and hospices and had for many years sat with several of his fellow academicians on the municipal council. He had been a member of the literary society and shared the reformist outlook of many of his bureaucratic colleagues when he was named a titular member of the Academy. He was also the only member of the society known to have owned the Encyclopédie, a work which he eventually gave to the Academy in exchange for a small annuity.³⁵

The rest of the Academy's members were drawn from Châlons's professional men and all of them seem to have had a personal link either to the Intendant or to municipal government and thus also to have known each other through professional and civic activities outside the Academy. Three were respected local doctors: Navier and Joseph Gellée had been members first of the Société littéraire and then titular members of the Academy; Jean-Baptiste Auger did not become a member of the Academy until 1786, but like the other two doctors he combined civic service with a busy local practice. It was in fact Auger who took over Navier's practice on the latter's death, becoming the busiest physician in Châlons where he

³⁴ For a discussion of the reformist posture and influence of Crown officials in Lille see Gail Bossenga, 'From Corps to Citizenship: The Bureaux des Finances before the French Revolution', in the Journal of Modern History, 58 (1986), 610-42.

³⁵ AD Marne I J 195 (see particularly the deliberations for 28 August 1777) and I J 208.

laboured for the next forty years serving, according to a contemporary account, with equal zeal both his poor patients in the countryside and in the poorer districts of Châlons and the wealthier citizens of the municipality.³⁶ Certainly the Academy's doctors, like its clerics, brought to its meetings a professional knowledge of the problems faced by the poor and the problems they posed for those with responsibilities for their care. Both Auger and Gellée worked under orders from the municipal council and central authorities; Gellée was employed as doctor to the Châlons dépôt de mendicité and his colleague was doctor to the town's hôtel Dieu, institutions where they would have encountered some of the town's most wretched denizens.³⁷

The next largest group of professional men in the Châlons Academy was made up not, as might be expected, of lawyers -- a lawyer called Meunier,

³⁶ Auger's parents had sustained a large family on a 'fortune mediocre' earned through the exercise of, in the words of a fellow academician, 'la profession utile et honorable de commerce'; their doctor son knew about hard work. Despite an enormous practice, he was, like his predecessor Navier, assiduous in his attendance at the Academy's meetings, presenting papers on medical and scientific topics: it was on the basis of his analysis of the waters of the Marne and of local sources of mineral waters that he was invited to join the Academy. Only forty when he was made a member of the Academy he became ever more prominent in local affairs thereafter, serving as deputy mayor of Châlons and member of the electoral college of the Châlons arrondissement. He also played a significant role in the town professionally, for apart from his own practice he was in the years after 1789 made 'officier de santé', named to the 'jury médical' for the department of the Marne and 'médecin des hôpitaux civile et militaire' of Châlons. He actually died at work in the hospital in 1813 having in the course of ten years' service treated a large number of the more than 10,000 combatants who passed through Châlons during the revolutionary wars. A notable who had earned the respect of the entire community, his cortege was accompanied by magistrates, doctors, academicians and, as an account of the event notes, 'des citoyens de toutes les classes, ... ages, ... sexe'. See Moignon, 'Éloge historique de M. Auger', Séance publique de la Société d'Agriculture (Châlons, Boniez, 1813), pp. 40-57.

³⁷ Dossiers in AD Marne C 1748 contain the annual letters from Rouillé d'Orfeuil to Gellée from 1781 to the Revolution regarding payment for these services. It was, in fact, fellow academician Soleau, who paid Gellée his stipend from central and municipal funds set aside for this purpose. On Auger's contribution to the care of the poor see Moignon, 'Éloge historique de M. Auger'.

who had also been a member of the literary society, was the only representative of the independent legal profession in the society³⁸ -- but three lay teachers from the Châlons collèges, Sabbathier, Paté and Richard d'Ancerville, a complement to the three clergymen teachers who were also members of the society. The presence of these six educators in the Academy gives powerful testimony to the importance its members attached to the role of education, which they considered critically significant in the task both of reforming retrograde institutions and practices and ameliorating the plight of ordinary Frenchmen and which they would make the subject of three of their public essay competitions.³⁹ Both Paté and Richard taught maths

³⁸ The young lawyer later known as Prieur dit de la Marne was among the eight men -- a doctor, lawyers, priests, and professors at the collèges -- nominated to fill the seat left vacant by Soleau's retirement in 1786. When the following year another seat in the Academy became vacant, Prieur was again nominated for membership but failed -- along with fifteen other nominees -- to gain entrance to the society. AD Marne I J 195 - deliberations for 31 May 1786 and 16 August 1787.

³⁹ The Academy's concern with the role of education in ameliorating the plight of the poor was first manifested publicly in its competition for 1779 on the importance of education for the popular classes and in its competition encouraging discussion of education for women and girls, proposed in 1781 for a prize to be awarded in 1783. The more conservative contest question on reform of education in the collèges was posed after the government began censoring its contest questions.

Although written in the overblown language of the period's public discourse and delivered under circumstances of close scrutiny by government authorities, the speech made by the Academy's director in May of 1786 to welcome as titular member the professor and principal of one of Châlons's collèges, the abbé Ménard, allows us to glimpse the importance attached to civic, spiritual, literary and scientific education by the notables member of the Châlons Academy: 'en admettant M^r Mesnard au nombre de nos confrères nous acquittons le tribut de reconnaissance que luy doivent toutes les ames honnetes. Nous voyons s'élever sous sa conduite des sujets qui serviront la Religion, des citoïens qui aimeront leur patrie, de jeunes gens qu'il forme aux arts et aux sciences et qui peutetre meriteront un jour par leurs talens d'etre admis parmi nous: la maison qu'il gouverne est le temple de la vertu, de la decence et du bon ordre'. AD Marne I J 210. Almost immediately after having accepted him into the society, the Academy set the educator to work preparing the résumé of the memoirs it had received for the only competition on educational reform which it had any hope of publishing, its competition on reform of education in the collèges. The résumé was published in Paris three years later under the title Plan d'Education nationale, tracé à l'occasion des Mémoires présentés à l'Académie de Châlons-sur-Marne, touchant les moyens de perfectionner

and physics and their place in the society also seems to reflect the Champagne Intendant's special interest in the practical economic applications of these subjects; even when he had moved to Paris Paté continued to work closely with Rouillé d'Orfeuil in his efforts to provide a regular weekend school for technical design and basic mathematics for Châlons's artisans and manual workers.⁴⁰ Sabbathier's work as an educator, his efforts to establish manufacturing in the region, and the relationship he enjoyed with the provincial Intendant have already been mentioned.

Clearly a significant number of those member of both the Châlons Société littéraire and the Academy were involved either directly or indirectly in the governance of public matters in their town or province. Apart, perhaps, from the educators, all of them were in regular contact with a cross-section of the population or with the administrative problems they represented and whether their job was caring for the sick, ministering to poor parishioners, supervising the forced labour of the royal corvée or employment projects like the ateliers de charité, policing the grain market or assessing or collecting taxes, it was obvious that for a substantial part of the population in their town and region poverty was an inescapable fact of life. Both the literary society and the Academy were to make the social and the economic problems and potentialities arising from this fact central to their activities and inquiries and so it is perhaps useful here to set these men and their concerns in the context of the social, economic, demographic and political conditions prevailing in Châlons and Champagne during the course of the eighteenth century.

l'éducation des collèges en France. Sujet du prix de l'année 1784 (Paris, Delalain l'Ainé, 1789).

⁴⁰ AD Marne I J 208.

CHAMPAGNE: A PROVINCE RICH IN POOR MEN

Champagne was not a rich province. The aridity of its soil was proverbial and, agriculturally, most of it so poor that a broad band of land running north and south from Châlons to Troyes became known as 'le genou de la Champagne'.⁴¹ Travelling through the province Arthur Young noted: 'le trait prédominant de la Champagne, c'est la craie; sur de grandes étendues le pays est maigre et pauvre; la partie méridionale, de Châlons à Troyes, à cause de la pauvreté, a reçu le nom de "pouilleuse"'. The Englishman was appalled by the misery of both the land and those attempting to scrape a living from it:

l'agriculture (à l'exception des vignes) est à un niveau si bas, si misérable [que] le propriétaire ne peut raisonnablement espérer rien que le plus maigre pitance [...]. En somme, les pauvres provinces crayeuses doivent être considérées comme la plus mauvaise de France.

Yet, while he deplored 'l'ignorance stupide des propriétaires et [leurs] préjugés pernicioeux' which, coupled with the soil's poverty and its low yields, gave scant hope that Champagne's landowners would invest significantly in agricultural improvement, Young nevertheless conceded that the misery of those who laboured the land for them inspired pity: 'la pauvreté des paysans', he wrote 'mérite la compassion'.⁴²

A report submitted to the government by the province's Intendant in 1759 provides a similar picture of the poverty both of the land and of those, man and beast, who laboured on it.

En Champagne le champ et le cultivateur offrent le spectacle de la plus profonde misère. Le cheptel peut à peine se soutenir. Le cultivateur n'a pas la subsistance de première nécessité. La moisson

⁴¹ Henri Menu, 'La Société littéraire et l'Académie des sciences, arts et belles-lettres de Châlons-sur-Marne', Mémoires de la Société d'Agriculture, Commerce, Sciences et Arts de la Marne, 1868, p.8.

⁴² Arthur Young, Voyages en France, translated by M.H.J Lesage, 2 vols, second edition (Paris, Guillaume, 1882), II, 516, 674, 830.

est grêle (thin, slender) en seigle, orge, avoine et blé noir. Les chaumes sont ramassés pour chauffer le paysan et cuire son pain de sarrazin [...]. Les marchés sont mal approvisionnés et la vente se fait mal.⁴³

When in 1787 the newly-created provincial assembly of Champagne was asked to draw up a report on agriculture in the region, it confirmed that grain yields were miserably low (3 for 1 for wheat, barley and buckwheat, 2½ for 1 for oats, 2 for 1 for rye) with the consequence that 'ainsi c'est avec douleur qu'on voit le malheureux recueillir de si faibles dédommagements du fruit de ses sueurs et de ses travaux'.⁴⁴ In very limited areas soil was better and the better grains could be grown. Around Reims and above all in the Perthois (election of Vitry) and in the Brie and the valleys along the Seine, Marne and Aisne, the land was more productive; but much of the better grain grown there was destined for markets outside the province. And of course the proximity of Paris promised significant profits for those -- a minority and often not farming the land themselves⁴⁵ -- who owned sufficient land in the more fertile parts of

⁴³ Poinson, Histoire générale de la Champagne et de la Brie, III, 355.

⁴⁴ Procès-verbaux des séances de l'Assemblée provinciale de Champagne, tenue à Châlons dans les mois d'août et novembre-décembre 1787 (Châlons, Seneuze, 1788). See, too, Maurice Poinson, Histoire, III, 414 ff.

⁴⁵ Tax (taille) rolls indicate that in many areas outlying the province's towns the best rural properties had been bought up by well-to-do town-dwellers. The cahiers of 1789 give ample testimony to the hostility of Champagne's rural micro-proprietors to the 'forains' whose exploitation of the larger and more productive properties in the countryside was seen by local laboureurs and manouvriers (the distinction between the two is not a clear one in the province) as a significant factor in their own emiseration: the cahiers insisted that not only did these outsiders cream off the best of the land and its products, 'l'envahissement du territoire par des forains non astreints à payer la taille [...] alourdit la charge des résidents'. Quoted in the Histoire de la Champagne, ed. Maurice Crubellier, Histoire des provinces (Toulouse, Édouard Privat, 1975), pp. 260-62 (p. 262).

Champagne to take advantage of these markets.⁴⁶ But fertile areas were limited and it was the poorer grains which were grown in the elections of Châlons and Troyes where, in the eighteenth century, bad weather often joined grudging ground to produce a long list of years in which harvests were desperately insufficient: during Louis XV's reign the worst years were 1740, 1741, 1767, 1771 and 1774 and during Louis XVI's reign 1777, 1782, 1784, 1785 and 1788-89.⁴⁷

Despite the efforts of the Intendants of Champagne to improve agricultural yields (by providing new and better seed) and to encourage animal husbandry (by offering prizes and subsidies to those who undertook to keep horses and chickens and by importing new breeds of cattle and sheep), these innovations had not yet significantly improved the plight of the province's peasants. What sheep farming there was in the region was either stagnant or in decline and, in any case, among the poorest it was

⁴⁶ So great was the temptation to sell the better grains elsewhere that in an average year a town the size of Reims (which in 1789 had 32,000 inhabitants) did not receive enough grain from surrounding areas to feed its people and so those responsible for public order were obliged to ensure adequate supplies would reach Reims from the Soissonnais or the Ardennes. Correspondence between Turgot and Rouillé d'Orfeuil about the provisioning of the markets at Reims, Châlons and Troyes indicates just how aware the government was of popular anxiety about the price and provisioning of grain. See Turgot's 'Lettre à l'Intendant de Champagne sur les primes à l'importation dans sa généralité', dated 7 April 1775 and quoted in Schelle, Oeuvres de Turgot, IV, 401-04. As early as 1697 the Champagne intendant Larcher warned the government of the effect locally of the lure of Paris's lucrative markets: 'Ce commerce est considérable et si avantageux à ceux qui le font qu'il n'y a guerres de Bourgeois et même d'Officiers de justice qui ne s'en meslent directement ou indirectement'. Larcher thus provides early testimony to the incursion by 'forains' into Champagne's commercial agriculture. Larcher is quoted in Crubellier, ed., Histoire de la Champagne, p. 255. See also Georges Clause, 'La Révolution: Mutations sociales ou consolidation d'un état de fait?' in *Ibid.*, p. 300.

⁴⁷ Poinsignon, Histoire, III, 411.

effectively discouraged by the decline of communal grazing rights.⁴⁸ Most of the peasantry in Champagne was simply too poor to consider experimentation with new methods, new grains or new breeds of sheep, and even before the central government attempted to introduce decontrol of the grain trade, bad harvests and an increasing number of middlemen acting in the grain markets had brought about a serious deterioration in the plight and prospects of all those, whether wage labourers or producer/consumers, who were dependent on local markets for their grain.

From the mid 1760s grain prices in the region rose precipitously, provoking popular discontent and an increasing number of sporadic riots in both Champagne and the Brie.⁴⁹ The rise in grain prices coincided with the rise in the number of grain speculators in the Champagne region where,

⁴⁸ Hard winters also seriously affected livestock. Although over the years the Intendants' efforts to encourage animal husbandry in the province had met with some success among more well-to-do peasants, a single hard winter could destroy years of labour. The cold was so extreme the winter of 1784, for example, that it killed some livestock outright and then, having destroyed virtually all the forage, it left many of those which had at first survived to die more pitifully of starvation. In 1785 Rouillé d'Orfeuil reported that in the course of the previous winter the 2,225 communities under his jurisdiction had lost approximately 1/8 of all their livestock (15,880 horses, 16,845 cattle and 209,898 sheep and goats) and that many peasants had little hope of being able to replace them. Poinson, *Ibid*, III, 415.

⁴⁹ In Troyes scarcity provoked full-scale grain riots in 1740-41 and in 1767. But riots which had been only occasional in the earlier period almost became the norm in the volatile Troyes market after that date. Between 1767 and 1775 intense speculation forced grain prices up prompting frequent popular 'emotions' which sowed great fear among both police and people. Popular anxiety about scarcity and speculation and hatred of those believed responsible for them eventually broke forth in desperate violence the summer of 1789 when an angry crowd killed the town's mayor, Claude Huez, whom they suspected of involvement in speculation. Though less volatile than the market at Troyes, those of Châlons (in 1768), Reims and Vitry (in 1770) and Dormans (in 1771) had also been the scene of serious popular disturbances as a result of high prices and scarcity in the last years of Louis XV's reign. AD Marne, Papiers de l'Intendance, Inventaire, art. 417, quoted by Poinson, *Histoire*, III, p. 497. On the death of Huez see Clause, 'La Révolution', pp. 301-02 and Lynn Hunt, *Revolution and Urban Politics*, pp. 92-95.

according to one historian, in the space of fifty years the number of middlemen working the market at Troyes quadrupled; in Châlons middlemen reportedly increased ten-fold.⁵⁰ By 1773 popular unrest as a result of high prices was so serious that the abbé Terray wrote to the province's then intendant, Rouillé d'Orfeuil: 'Je ne puis trop vous dire combien l'esprit de fermentation qui agite le peuple m'inquiète, ni trop vous recommander de prendre tous les moyens pour le calmer!'⁵¹

And it was not simply the microproprietor and the wage labourer who made up the bulk of the workforce in pays de grande culture like the Beauce, the Brie and Champagne who were suffering. A market prey to the depredations of both speculators and the weather could bring misery even to those peasants who in good conditions were able to feed themselves. Without reserves while from day to day living and producing on the margins, even the peasant normally able to subsist on what he grew was unable to stay above subsistence when natural disaster struck; and yet bad weather seemed increasingly to plague Champagne in the years of Louis XVI's reign. In 1774 Rouillé d'Orfeuil described for the central government the scale of the problem for that year:

le cinquième des paroisses de la généralité a été tellement maltraité par la grêle, que les habitants auront besoin de secours

⁵⁰ Leon Cahen, 'Le Pacte de famine et les speculations sur les blés', Revue historique, 152 (1926), 32-43 (p. 37).

⁵¹ AD Marne, Papiers de l'intendance. Inventaire, art. 417 - letter dated 30 May 1773 and quoted by Poinsignon, III, 497. The most widespread riots in the period before the Revolution occurred in 1775 when the so-called guerre des farines led to the pillaging of markets at Meaux, Neuilly St-Front and Château-Thierry and in Champagne as well. The grain riots in Champagne were of no little concern to the government which was making preparation for Louis XVI's coronation in Reims in June of 1775. See the letter of 16 May 1775 from Turgot to Rouillé d'Orfeuil 'demande des renseignements sur les dégâts commis pendant les émeutes', quoted in Schelle, Oeuvres de Turgot, IV, 448-49.

extraordinaires pour leur procurer une subsistance qu'ils ne trouveront point dans leur récolte.⁵²

And in 1789, an even more disastrous year for the cultivator in Champagne:

La province de Champagne est on ne saurait plus maltraitée dans ses récoltes en froment, en seigle et en vins, les deux premières étant insuffisantes pour la subsistance des habitants, le troisième ne devant être comptée pour rien. M. l'Intendant ne peut exprimer à quel point est déplorable la situation des malheureux habitants des pays vignobles qui forment le quart de la population entière de cette généralité, et l'excès de leur misère réellement effrayant. En effet, cette classe nombreuse de contribuables, déjà épuisée par la cherté excessive du pain pendant la présente année, se trouve en ce moment privée de tout espoir de récoltes et peut-être même pour plusieurs années, si, comme il paraît certain, les vignes sont gelées jusqu'à la racine.⁵³

In his report to the government D'Orfeuil described these peasants as 'contribuables' and if, from the point of view of a near bankrupt state, their potential financial contribution was a primary characteristic of Crown subjects in Champagne, this was neither a new role nor one they bore lightly.

⁵² Poinson, Histoire, III, 411-12. The number of the desperately poor was so high in Châlons that, already in 1770, the town council had established ateliers de charité to provide the unemployed with work. In 1775 the council responded to a similar crisis by distributing bread to the indigent on a large scale, a measure repeated in 1778, 1783 and 1784. 1784 was a particularly hard winter and flooding affected 93 parishes in Champagne, destroying 103 bridges and making 2,279 families homeless and leaving them without household goods or livestock. The subdélégué of Reims wrote to the Intendant 27 February: 'Vous ne pouvez vous imaginer l'état affreux de ces misérables; je ne sais auquel répondre. Les moulins sur ces deux rivières (the Suipe and the Vesle) sont presque tous détruits ou dans l'impuissance de moudre de longtemps; les villages de l'intérieur des terres sont au moment de manquer de farines.' It was the same in the subdélégation of Sainte-Menehould and in all the generality of Châlons. AD Marne C 1980 and 1982. See Bloch, L'Assistance et l'état, p. 11 and p.327.

⁵³ AD Marne C 424 quoted in Poinson in Ibid. The vulnerability of those who worked Champagne's vineyards was a constant theme of Rouillé d'Orfeuil's letters to the government. See, for example, his letter to Necker 12 January 1778 in AD Marne C 2005. There were some parishes where 'presque tous' the inhabitants of a village were reduced to begging. AD Marne G 273, quoted in Camille Bloch, L'Assistance et l'état à la veille de la Révolution: Généralités de Paris, Rouen, Alençon, Orléans, Châlons, Soissons, Amiens (1764-1790) (Paris, Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1908), p. 8.

A large province stretching towards Paris in the west, to Lorraine in the east and to the Austrian Netherlands in the north, Champagne had been a highway -- when not a theatre -- of war for more than a century. And its capital Châlons still supported a significant military presence in Louis XVI's reign. Indeed, when in 1777 the Intendant Rouillé d'Orfeuil petitioned d'Ormesson for government funds to pay the annual running costs of the new Châlons Academy, he did so reminding the minister that

les revenus de cette ville sont plus qu'absorbés tant par ses charges ordinaires que par la dépense considérable que lui occasionne le logement d'une compagnie des gardes du Roy qui y est en garnison depuis dix-sept ans.⁵⁴

Yet, however heavily weighed the burden of these royal troops on the resources of the province's administrative centre, it was insignificant when compared to the rising and crippling burden of royal taxes in the province as a whole, the fiscal legacy in royal debt of earlier and contemporary military adventures.

Champagne was not the generality most heavily burdened by royal taxes -- an honour that went to the Paris region where the taxpayer paid more per head than anywhere else in Europe.⁵⁵ Yet when in 1787 the élection of

⁵⁴ AD Marne C 1768. Intendance de Champagne, Instruction publique, Université de Reims, Sociétés savantes 1739-1790. Letter dated 3 July 1777. It is important to remember the high price paid by towns like Châlons for the military preparedness of Crown troops even in peacetime. The Châlons literary and academic societies included fiscal officials responsible for the collection and administration of Crown taxes as well as municipal officials responsible for maintaining public order and -- with local clergy -- for meeting the legitimate needs of local poor; like the Intendant, these local leaders were all acutely aware of the drain on public funds which was directly or indirectly the result of the presence or passage of royal troops. For an example of this concern among town councillors see the Registre des délibérations of Châlons's municipal council for 14 May 1772 where officials went on record with their complaint that their's was a town 'sujette plus qu'aucune autre aux passages des troupes qui y abordent de toutes parts independamment d'une garnison habituelle qui lui est extremement onéreuse'. Poinsignon, Histoire, III, 345.

⁵⁵ R.R. Palmer, The Age of Democratic Revolution. I. The Challenge (Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 155.

Châlons met for the first time as an assembly to assess the strengths and needs of the region, the privileged and notables in that assembly reckoned that the burden of the taille, which fell on those generally least able to pay, had increased by between a third and a half in the Champagne region in the twenty years since 1760.⁵⁶ When the assembly met at the provincial level that same year it determined that for a territorial revenue of 100 livres the taillable in Champagne was expected to pay between 54 and 71 livres; and yet the region's poverty made it impossible for many of those liable to the tax to meet these demands and survive on the land. There were a large number of peasants who simply could not find the money to pay the whole of their tax.⁵⁷

As elsewhere in France the peasants in Champagne also suffered the vexations of dues owed to lay and ecclesiastical seigneurs -- dues which, increasingly, they were unwilling to pay without protest. A recent study has found that in the half century preceding the revolution peasants in three-quarters of village communities in one part of the region were

⁵⁶ 'Il est prouvé que dans une révolution de vingt ans, antérieure à 1780, l'imposition qui pèse sur la partie indigent, le brevet général, a été augmentée dans cette province de plus d'un tiers, on pourroit presque dire de moitié. [...] Quelle autre généralité a plus que celle-ci éprouvé la malheureuse influence de ces opérations de finance.' Procès verbaux de séances, p. 22. This was a figure agreed by both those obliged to pay the taille and those who by their privileged status were not liable for this tax. In Champagne the brevet de la taille included five sorts of tax: the taille, the taillon for the gendarmerie, a tax to fund the maréchaussée, and for housing for the military as well as a second brevet dit des impositions accessoires for roads and bridges, the militia, lodging the permanent troops, etc. The province's share by 1785, which included the two brevets and the capitation, had reached an all-time high of 4,832,916 livres per annum. See Poinson, Histoire générale, III, 397. On the brevet see Philippe Sueur, Histoire du droit public français XV^e - XVIII^e siècle, 2 vols (Paris, PUF, 1989), II. Affirmation et crise de l'État sous l'Ancien Régime, pp. 330-31.

⁵⁷ In 1785 in just one of the region's élections 95 of those responsible for the collection of the taille failed to collect sufficient tax and were themselves imprisoned as a result. See Poinson, III, 396 and Georges Clause, 'La Révolution' in Crubellier, ed., Histoire de la Champagne, p. 297.

involved in some sort of legal action against their seigneurs.⁵⁸ And, according to the figures reported by the provincial assembly of Champagne in 1787, the burden of transfer payments being born by those without privilege in the region was driving thousands to abandon agricultural work. The assembly estimated that since Louis XVI had come to the throne almost one-third of the province's cultivators had been forced off the land by the combined effect of poverty, taxes and the other payments exacted of them.⁵⁹ Of those who remained, many were little better than paupers because, as Arthur Young had noted, in Champagne a holding destined to support a whole family often consisted of a 'un arbre fruitier avec dix perches de terrain' -- that is, if the family were fortunate enough to own any land at all.⁶⁰ Those rural poor who sought salaried agricultural day

⁵⁸ Jean-Jacques Clère, 'Les Paysans de la Haute Marne et la Révolution française (1780-1825): Recherches sur la communauté villageoise' (thesis in law, University of Dijon, 1980), p. 256; quoted by Hilton Lewis Root in 'Challenging the Seigneurie: Community and Contention on the Eve of the French Revolution' in Journal of Modern History, 57.4 (Dec 1985), 662-63.

⁵⁹ The assembly estimated in 1787 that the number of cultivators had dropped from 35,000 to 25,000 between 1774 and 1787. Figures cited by Maurice Crubellier and Charles Juillard, Histoire de la Champagne, Que sais-je? (Paris, PUF, 1969), pp. 56-57.

⁶⁰ Arthur Young, Voyages en France, II, 200. A perche or rod equals 5½ yards or about 5 meters. It is perhaps worth quoting Arthur Young at some length on an encounter he had with a peasant woman in the Marne 12 July of 1789: 'Walking up a long hill [...] I was joined by a poor woman, who complained of the times, and that it was a sad country; demanding her reasons, she said her husband had but a morsel of land, one cow, and a poor little horse, yet they had a franchar (42 lb.) of wheat, and three chickens, to pay as a quit-rent to one Seigneur; and four franchar of oats, one chicken and 1 s. to pay to another besides very heavy tailles and other taxes. She had seven children, and the cow's milk helped to make the soup. [...] It was said, at present, that something was to be done by great folks for such poor ones, but she did not know who nor how, but God send us better, car les tailles & les droits nous ecrasent.' Young's Travels in France during the Years 1787, 1788, 1789, ed. M. Betham-Edwards (London, B. Gell and Sons, 1915), p. 197.

labour, either to supplement meagre holdings or to provide the whole of their income, earned no more than 6 to 12 sols per day.⁶¹

Either part-time or full-time work in rural manufacturing, particularly in textiles, enabled some to remain on the land in the hinterlands of Reims and Troyes; but the wages offered by middlemen were exploitative and significantly below those paid for similar work in the towns. Indeed, from this period there were increasing complaints from textile workers in the towns that the low wages accepted by those in the country were undermining the jobs and security of those who had no other means of sustaining themselves. So, while in Champagne's largest towns the wine trade and textiles brought great wealth to new bourgeois dynasties of négociants, those dependent on daily or weekly wages from manufacturing suffered immediate and desperate poverty whenever bread prices outstripped wages or whenever war, or even a peaceful treaty with a foreign power, disrupted trade or imposed unfavourable commercial conditions, since the region's urban and peasant population was too poor to represent a reliable or lucrative market for the cheaper manufactured goods. So neither rural nor urban manufacturing really provided a viable alternative for all Champagne's labouring poor.

Population (estimated at 810,000 in Champagne in the 1780s) was too large for the amount of land or salaried work available to those who needed them to survive so the number of workers seeking paid employ in the province always exceeded the number of available jobs. And despite government encouragement, the number of looms functioning in major textile centres like Reims on the eve of the revolution had still not regained

⁶¹ This is the rate for day labour most frequently cited in the cahiers. Bread fluctuated near 4 sols per pound; therefore it took the combined labour of the entire family for the poor man to survive in Champagne as in so many provinces in late eighteenth-century France. Crubellier and Juillard, Histoire de la Champagne, p. 61.

levels reached in the seventeenth-century.⁶² Wages were so low in Reims in 1775 -- the year of Louis XVI's coronation and, perhaps not coincidentally, the year in which the Châlons Academy framed its first contest question on the plight of the begging poor -- that there were more than 10,000 poor workers who could not earn enough to survive without some form of outside assistance and, yet, the city's textile workers had known and would know much more severe conditions. The years of the most intense industrial crisis in Champagne's largest cities were 1767-1770, 1782-83 and 1787-89 and in these years the poverty of workers was so extreme that only government intervention prevented either riot or starvation. In the final years of Rouillé d'Orfeuil's intendancy and the Châlons Academy's contests the situation of the Reims textile workers had become so deplorable that only 'les plus aisés' among the workers -- those whose 'sort' was envied -- were able to eat 'une fois par semaine la viande et de la soupe grasse' and even they reportedly lived 'entassés dans des chaumières étroites, mal

⁶² Manufacturing had suffered steady decline in Champagne since the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and the late eighteenth century saw an acceleration of this process. According to the director of the Châlons Academy, speaking in 1790, the continuous fall in textile output had prompted a decline in the population of Châlons within a century from 40,000 to only 13,000 on the eve of the Revolution. Delacourt, 'Discours prononcé à l'ouverture de la séance publique de l'Académie des sciences, arts et belles-lettres de Châlons-sur-Marne, le 25 août 1790', (Châlons, 1790), p. 20. The provincial assembly had estimated that textile production in Châlons had fallen to an all-time low in Louis XVI's reign, employing only 500 workers who were producing poor quality cloth destined for local artisans and country people; during the same period textile production was reported to employ 30,000 people in and around Reims. For earlier contemporary testimony to Châlons' commercial decline see Bibliothèque municipale de Reims MS 1551, 'Description abrégée de la province de Champagne, extraite des Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de Champagne par l'Abbé Beschefer', p. 10. The academic abbé Beschefer's study was published in the nineteenth century by A. Aubert (Châlons, J.L. Leroy, 1866).

nourris, mal vêtus'.⁶³ By the beginning of 1788 more than two-thirds of the 30,000 dependent on textile work to live were suffering terribly from the trade and industrial crisis which had hit the city; and the situation was made still worse by bread prices which were high and by fears aroused by the state of the markets which for six months had been poorly supplied with grain.⁶⁴

But popular suffering was not confined to the cities; misery was widespread in both town and country and in December of 1788 the provincial assembly's intermediary commission confided to Necker:

Les bureaux intermédiaires nous présentent le tableau le plus affligeant de la misère qui règne dans les villes et dans les campagnes. L'artisan, l'ouvrier des manufactures, le manoeuvre ne trouvent plus les moyens de procurer à leur famille une subsistance suffisante, et leur vie est une privation continuelle des besoins les plus absolus. Les fermiers n'ont pas récolté de quoi payer leurs maîtres; le rentier, le laboureur, enfin toutes les classes de citoyens souffrent, et peu de contribuables sont en état de payer une partie de leurs impositions avant la récolte de 1789.⁶⁵

⁶³ These eye-witness accounts were reported in the nineteenth century by those who had lived through the events of the pre-revolutionary period in Reims. Cited by Bloch in L'Assistance et l'état, pp. 9-10. During the industrial crisis that immediately preceded the revolution a day's work for a Reims textile worker, when he or she could get work, was paid at a rate of 4 to 5 sols. And in the heart of the city, 'à l'ombre des somptueuses abbayes de Saint-Nicaise, de Saint-Remi et du couvent des Minimes, se dissimulait un quartier insalubre, beaucoup plus peuplé que les autres et où étaient entassés [...] plusieurs milliers de ménages d'ouvriers'. See Gustave Laurent's 'Introduction aux Cahiers de doléances du bailliage de Reims', Reims et la région rémoise à la veille de la Révolution. La Convocation des États-Généraux (Reims, Matot-Braine, 1930).

⁶⁴ Lynn Hunt has prepared a graph charting the coincidence of high grain prices and food riots in Reims and Troyes from May 1788-December 1789. See her Revolution and Urban Politics, p. 42.

⁶⁵ AD Marne C 2666. The situation in Troyes, though on a smaller scale, was also grave. In 1787-88 1,500 looms were stilled and the town set up 400 unemployed textile workers in work. The industrial crisis was said to be the direct result of the Anglo-French commercial treaty of 1786.

Nevertheless, the 'émeutes de la misère et de la faim' which took place in Champagne in 1789, although perhaps more severe and more widespread than usual, were in fact but one more in a series of disturbances that had troubled this province for decades. Champagne was above all a province rich in poor men and it was this fact which compelled the province's intendants and Châlons literary and academic society to take up their cause.

THE SOCIAL UTILITARIAN FOCUS OF THE LITERARY AND ACADEMIC SOCIETIES

Given the scale and the present and potential social and political implications of the poverty which reigned in much of Champagne as well as the administrative and professional responsibilities which the members of Châlons' learned society exercised there, the centrality of economic and social problems to the discussions and inquiries of these local notables and civic leaders is hardly surprising. Accounts of their earliest activities indicate that in both their private deliberations and the public meetings they held from 1756, members used their gatherings to address the economic problems of their town and region, promoting practical measures to encourage growth in manufacturing and agriculture and improve the prospects of the labouring poor whom most of them were destined by profession, vocation or office to serve or govern. Most of the society's members were without great literary pretensions and, as their society moved into its second decade, members apparently decided it was time for them to acknowledge publicly that, despite its name, the so-called literary society in Châlons was in fact directing its activities towards more practical, economic matters: in January of 1762 the society announced in a national monthly, the Journal économique, that it planned henceforth to devote more

of its attention to economic matters, particularly agriculture.⁶⁶ Although its announcement was expressed in language that may well have reflected awareness of the fashionable new economic doctrines emerging from physiocratic circles in Paris, or of those doctrines refracted through policy directives issuing from the Controller General Bertin, it is reasonable to assume that the Châlons society's focus on the economic problems of their town and region went beyond a modish following of the économistes or even a pragmatic preoccupation with the maintenance of social order. The problems which concerned these would-be academicians reveal instead a remarkably compassionate apprehension of the human faces of poverty which had become familiar to these men in their various professional or administrative capacities in Châlons and its environs. Living in a province whose economic base, however poor, was primarily agricultural, and in a town and region where manufacturing employed a relatively small minority of the workforce, these local civic leaders seem to have decided deliberately to concentrate their attention and that of their public on the agriculture and rural industry of Châlons and Champagne and on the social welfare of parishioners, patients, contribuables or corvéables who, despite their best efforts, were trapped in a debilitating cycle of poverty and misery.

An inventory by title of the papers members of the literary society wrote and read to one another in their assemblies survives among the Academy's dossiers. Although the titles indicate that these papers included the occasional reading of an ode to the literary arts or in praise of a provincial worthy long since dead or, more frequently, a learned

⁶⁶ The society made this declaration, first in its public meeting of 1761 and then again in the Journal économique (p. 6). As has been noted, two of the society's corresponding members, Dreux du Radier and Antoine Le Camus, were among that journal's regular contributors.

dissertation on regional archeology or ecclesiastical history, the list is dominated by memoirs on the social and economic problems of the region and its members' search for practical means to relieve them:

- Mémoire concernant des recherches économiques sur les moyens d'augmenter la production des grains et de fertiliser les terres arides de la Champagne
- Mémoire sur le blanchiment des toiles
- Mémoire sur les causes de la rareté du bois de chauffage en Champagne et les moyens d'y remédier
- Mémoire sur les causes de la dépopulation
- Mémoire sur la culture des mauvaises terres de Champagne
- Mémoire sur l'agriculture
- Mémoire sur les moyens de fertiliser les terres de la mauvaise Champagne
- Mémoire sur les engrais propres aux terres crayeuses de la haute Champagne
- Réflexions sur le gouvernement des troupeaux pour rendre les engrais plus abondants et plus profitables
- Mémoire sur le rétablissement de la culture des terres en Champagne
- Mémoire sur les avantages que l'on retirerait de la culture du sainfoin si l'on en faisant usage dans les terres de la Haute Champagne
- Mémoire sur l'application particulière que l'on doit donner à l'agriculture
- Mémoire sur les moyens qu'on pourroit employer pour diriger le cours des eaux de la Marne [de la façon] la plus avantageuse à l'agriculture
- Moyens de rétablir les prairies
- Mémoire sur les plantations et les semis du bois dans la maigre Champagne
- Réflexions sur les labours de la Haute-Champagne

Members discussed the advisability of promoting a new plough in the region, the introduction of new strains of oats and rye, and the advantages of planting spring and winter wheat and of cultivating beets and rape. Together they worked on manuals on how to teach farmers to treat sheep pox and the various maladies of horses as well as considering, on at least two occasions, papers on the urgency of introducing sheep farming into areas where Champagne's soil was poorest.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ The list of papers considered by the literary society has been drawn up using a manuscript inventory of the papers once held in the archives of the Academy, which is now housed in the Châlons municipal library - MS 1280 - Inventaire générale des titres, mémoires, manuscrits, ouvrages imprimés et des différents effets de l'Académie des sciences, arts et belles lettres de Châlons-sur-Marne, depuis son établissement.

The concerns represented by the treatises read to the society were not only technical; as befitting men whose civic and professional activities gave them personal responsibility for the conduct or care of those finding it difficult to make a living in Châlons and Champagne, members were also worried about the social consequences of economic hardship. So even their technical inquiries were approached from the point of view of the province's poor men -- for example, among their papers we find they discussed a 'Discours sur les moyens de rendre la préparation du petit-lait [whey] facile, utile et peu coûteuse pour les pauvres' or, with particular emphasis on the plight of peasants who lacked the money to buy scarce and expensive wood for heating and cooking, 'les causes de la rareté du bois de chauffage en Champagne et les moyens d'y remédier'. The archives also reveal members' concern about what they could do to alleviate the urgent but perennial problem of those peasants who without secondary labour found it almost impossible to survive from Champagne's poor soil on inadequate small-holdings or tenancies: 'Mémoire sur la nécessité de procurer de l'ouvrage aux habitants de la maigre Champagne' or the more general but equally sympathetic 'Mémoire en faveur des pauvres habitants de la maigre Champagne'. Year after year members also discussed 'les causes de la dépopulation', seeking to set forth a clear explanation of why so many of the region's peasants were forsaking agriculture altogether either to roam as beggars or to end dependent on relief which those involved in municipal administration knew was inadequate for their needs and numbers. Since none of the several treatises on this last topic has survived, we can only imagine the sorts of 'causes' succeeding savants may have advanced in explanation for rural emigration. However, it is perhaps not unreasonable to speculate that Crown officials and magistrates responsible for taxation or the adjudication of grievances between landowners and peasant tenants

or engineers cast in the role of inspectors on the construction of Crown highways may well have included the fiscal inequities and economic hardships of life for Champagne's peasantry among other factors provoking the region's rural exodus. But even without being able to analyze the content of these papers, we can conclude from a listing of their titles that the members of this society acted and wrote from the viewpoint of those who benefited from professional insight as well as personal sympathy for the plight of those suffering hardship in the province. The orientation towards the poor man and his problems reflected in the treatises produced by and for the society also clearly foreshadowed the social utilitarian and humanitarian questions which its members would pose for national consideration in the public essay competitions their status as a royal academy would eventually allow them to hold in the reign of Louis XVI.

Comparing the topics considered by the literary society with those the Academy posed for public discussion in its annual essay contests, we discover that throughout its history the Châlons society seems to have used its inquiries to bring together for discussion within the society and its public meetings as much practical wisdom and experience as it could obtain so that the information and recommendations generated could be used to improve the economic prospects and reduce the suffering of those in the province's labouring classes. Their concerns in the 1750s, 1760s and early 1770s resurface in only very slightly altered form in the competitions of the royal society. The Academy would, for example, repeatedly ask for suggestions about how to 'animer le commerce de la province de Champagne et particulièrement de la ville de Châlons' (1783, 1785, 1786 and 1788) or how to 'multiplier en Champagne la culture du lin et du chanvre et d'en fixer la préparation dans la province au plus grand avantage de ses

habitans' (1787 and 1788); it asked for practical advice on 'le moyen de mettre en culture les terres incultes, arides et stériles de la Champagne' (1790) and 'les meilleurs moyens d'établir en Champagne des manufactures de toiles dans les lieux où il n'y en a point, et de les perfectionner dans ceux où il y en a déjà' (proposed for 1790), questions which pointed to the need to create jobs and feed a hungry populace. It also returned to an abiding concern of the Société littéraire by asking the public in 1786 to write on 'les moyens de prévenir en France et particulièrement dans la province de Champagne la disette des bois'.

But the Academy not only asked the public to provide specific and positive suggestions about what could be done to stimulate the economy or encourage new or more productive agriculture or manufacturing or respond to practical needs like the shortage of wood. Like the literary society before it, the Academy also announced questions that focused on the social consequences of a majority poor populace: its most successful competition, 1776-77, asked the public to present their views on 'les moyens de détruire la mendicité en rendant les mendiants utiles à l'État sans les rendre malheureux'. And for its competition of 1782-83 the Academy generalized its concern with the plight of the labouring poor in Champagne to initiate a national contest which invited competitors from across the country to suggest ways to 'améliorer en France la condition des laboureurs, des journaliers vivant à la campagne, celle de leurs femmes et de leurs enfants'. These questions, and those that the Academy announced for the years between these two highly successful competitions, encouraged the public to support the most progressive reforms being essayed by the government -- even when these had gone suddenly out of favour; they also, by implication, authorized competition essayists to point an accusing finger at laws, institutions or practices which the Academy, by the wording

of its questions, clearly considered significant factors in an unjust social, economic, fiscal and judicial system generating widespread economic distress and social unrest among ordinary working people. These were the public competitions on questions like that for 1778-79 on 'les moyens les moins onéreux à l'État et au peuple de construire et d'entretenir les grands chemins', posed just after Turgot's reforms of the corvée had been abandoned; the competition for 1780 on 'les moyens les plus avantageux pour administrer la Champagne', based openly on the experimental assembly established in Berry by Necker to assess and collect taxes, administer road works and provincial poor relief; or the three competitions of 1780, 1781 and 1782 on judicial reform which were explicitly critical of France's criminal and civil laws and institutions and the judicial practices supporting them and which followed in the wake of Maupeou's short-lived but radical reform of the French judiciary.⁶⁸ And for 1789, a year when in Champagne alone vast numbers of the peasantry were finding it impossible to survive on the land, the Academy recast a question of almost perennial concern to the Société littéraire, but now asked of a national audience and almost prophetically, 'Quelles sont les causes les plus ordinaires de

⁶⁸ The wording of the Châlons Academy's three questions on judicial reform left competitors in little doubt as to its members' views: 'Quelles pourroient être en France les lois pénales les moins sévères et cependant les plus efficaces pour contenir & réprimer les crimes, par des châtimens prompts et exemplaires en ménageant l'honneur et la liberté des citoyens?' (posed for 1780); 'Lorsque la société civile ayant accusé un de ses membres par l'organe du ministère public, succombe dans cette accusation, quels seraient les moyens les plus praticables et les moins dispendieux de procurer au citoyen reconnu innocent le dédommagement qui lui est dû de droit naturel?'; and 'Quels seraient les moyens de rendre la justice en France avec le plus de célérité et le moins de frais possible?' (posed for 1781 and 1782 respectively).

l'émigration des habitants de la campagne vers les grandes villes et quels seraient les moyens les plus propres à les retenir dans leurs foyers?'.⁶⁹

Although poverty and its social consequences was clearly a consistent theme in all the Châlons body's inquiries, both as a literary society and as an academy, there was an evolution in its concerns towards topics that were more and more explicitly political. Even before their society was made a royal academy these Châlons civic leaders and government officials seem to have shared an astonishing optimism about the contribution their inquiries could make and a profound conviction that the practical experience and insight available to government from an informed citizenry could play a crucial role in influencing policies that would improve the prospects of a population and province whose economic predicament seemed to be otherwise so pessimistic. The optimism shared by members of the Châlons society was grounded not only in their own active professional involvement and commitment to administrative and public service; it drew strength and direction from its members' relationship to and confidence in the reforming intentions and activities of the royal intendant who administered Champagne throughout most of the society's long history. It is their relationship to him and through him to the essays in reform introduced late in Louis XV's reign and early in the reign of Louis XVI that we will now turn.

CHAMPAGNE'S ENLIGHTENED INTENDANT: THE SOCIETIES' RELATIONS TO ROUILLÉ D'ORFEUIL AND THE MOVEMENT FOR REFORM

Gaspard Rouillé d'Orfeuil became Intendant of Champagne in 1764 and was almost immediately asked, along with the bishop of Châlons, to accept the

⁶⁹ Information about the questions the Academy posed for successive essay competitions is taken from AD Marne I J 35-55 and 195.

title of 'président né' of the Société littéraire.⁷⁰ The new intendant enjoyed influence both at court⁷¹ and in intellectual circles and was skilful in using it for the benefit of his province and of the Châlons literary and academic societies. He was a student, though not a disciple, of the physiocrats, particularly of the ideas of those deviant members of that school Turgot and Gournay, whose influence on him is confirmed by d'Orfeuil's own writing and policies⁷² and by the testimony of no less

⁷⁰ Menu, 'La Société littéraire', p. 35. Rouillé d'Orfeuil, who had first served as maître des requêtes (1752-1761) and then Intendant of La Rochelle (1762-1764), was himself the son of a maître des requêtes and grandson of a Limousin intendant. His father was brother-in-law to another enlightened intendant Caze de la Bove. The ascent of the Rouillé family to eminence in the royal administration began with the Intendant's great grandfather Louis Rouillé in the last decades of the seventeenth century. His family appears to have served as carters and ferrymen in and around Tours and Louis Rouillé himself quite possibly began his career as a merchant there. He began his social climb as a mail carrier, first in Tours and then in Paris, employed by the Marquis de Louvois, who was in charge of the royal postal service. The future intendant's great-grandfather then worked his way up from postal clerk in a local bureau to head of the provincial mail service in Touraine to become director and controller-general of the postal service for all of France in 1679. That same year Louis Rouillé purchased the office of secrétaire du roi and thereby ennobled himself and his posterity. See Vivian R. Gruder, The Royal Provincial Intendants: A Governing Elite in Eighteenth-Century France (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1968), pp. 149-50; Paul Ardascheff, Les Intendants de province sous le règne de Louis XVI, transl. L. Jousserandot, 3 vols (Paris, Felix Alcan, 1909), p. 56; and Étienne Prévost de Levaud, Les Théories de L'Intendant Rouillé d'Orfeuil (Rochechouart, Dupanier Frères, 1909).

⁷¹ Villers calls d'Orfeuil 'un auxiliaire de choix' of the Chancellor Maupeou, describing the Intendant as an 'homme élégant, intrigant, fort bien en Cour, qui entretenait depuis de longues années des relations d'amitié avec Maupeou'. L'Organisation du Parlement de Paris, p. 159.

⁷² There is confusion over the authorship of three strongly physiocratic and utopian works which appeared in the 1770s and which have been attributed to d'Orfeuil: L'Ami des français (1771, supposedly published in Constantinople), L'Alambic des loix, ou observations de l'Ami des français (1773, Hispaan), and L'Alambic moral ou analyse raisonnée de tout ce qui a rapport à l'Homme par l'Ami des Français (1773, Maroc). Prévost de Levaud had no doubt that D'Orfeuil was the author. However, evidence would seem to indicate that it was his cousin who actually composed these works, although the Champagne administrator undoubtedly strongly influenced if not aided the author, a military officer. In them one finds repeated an original variant of physiocratic ideas which is also evident in much of the intendant's dealing with his subdélégués and the

than Mirabeau and the master of that school Quesnay. In the margins of a manuscript version of Mirabeau's Philosophie rurale Quesnay reminded its author:

Vous avez votre réponse à faire sur l'agriculture à monsieur votre intendant de Champagne et c'est à cela que vous travaillez nuit et jour; c'est pour cela que vous avez tant à calculer pour l'Académie qu'il établit dans sa province, comme on en établit dans tous les autres.⁷³

Quesnay's note demonstrates the new intendant's interest in promoting the work of the Châlons society in his efforts to reduce the burdens which, in his words, 'entravaient de toutes partes l'agriculture'. Immediately following his appointment to Champagne d'Orfeuil emulated the work of his predecessor but one, the former Champagne intendant Le Pelletier de Beaupré, who during the 1740s had drawn up a detailed survey of taxable land in Champagne and had attempted to determine what real revenues from it were so that a tax proportionate to real income, a taille tarifée, could be established in the province. Rouillé d'Orfeuil continued and extended his predecessor's reformist work, refining the provincial cadastre in the hope of being able eventually to relieve the poorest and impose taxes on those most able to pay.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, he used his administrative authority to reduce the tax burden on the taillables when, as was frequent during his

central government. The stubborn optimism (particularly about reforms in taxation, the corvée and government use of ecclesiastical land and wealth) and reformist vision of a regenerated France present in these works and in d'Orfeuil's administrative correspondence provide some indication of the intendant's openness to change and of the administrative support the Châlons literary society and academy would have enjoyed as -- with the intendant's support -- its role in public life expanded.

⁷³ Quesnay's comment is quoted by Weulersse, Le Mouvement physiocratique, I, 81-82, note 3. The literary society's efforts to gain official status as an academy predate d'Orfeuil's arrival in the province. The inventory of manuscripts once held by the Academy includes the following entry, dated 1762: 'Lettre des membres de la Société à [...] Mgr Le Comte de Clermont pour obtenir les lettres patentes'.

⁷⁴ Maurice Bordes, 'Les Intendants éclairés de la fin de l'Ancien régime', Revue d'histoire économique et sociale, 39 (1961), 63.

intendancy, economic crisis menaced their survival. In this action, as in so much else during his administration, keeping the labouring poor in work and not begging or relying on formal public assistance for survival seems to have been a principal goal of his administration.⁷⁵ His response to their needs consistently went beyond official government guidelines, his solicitude was such that he would use administrative measures (and government funds) to effect relief and introduce reforms locally that had not yet achieved the sanction of law.

D'Orfeuil enlisted the help of the Châlons literary society in this endeavour. As Quesnay's comment to Mirabeau indicates, the Champagne intendant seems to have regarded this local learned society as a channel through which he could promote reform initiatives on a practical, local level and as a forum in which to generate broader discussion of them. From his arrival in Châlons d'Orfeuil took a lively interest in the literary society, not only by becoming its 'président né', but by attending its public meetings and actively encouraging it to believe that he was interested in receiving any information that its members considered might be useful to him in his administration of the province. Through his own personal administrative secretary who, like his predecessor in that post, was an active member of the society, the intendant maintained close relations with members and regularly commissioned them to verify new scientific, agricultural and industrial techniques; he also urged them to

⁷⁵ D'Orfeuil's concern was founded in a fact of life in this pays de grande culture, where most of the population had insufficient land to survive without paid and seasonal work. It was said that there were more vagabonds per head in Champagne than anywhere else in all of France. Hufton, The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750-1789 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 267. D'Orfeuil's efforts in behalf of the poor are detailed in AD Marne C 1700-13 - Travaux de charité, 1770-1790; C 2001 - Mendicité, correspondance ministérielle, 1772-1790, C 2005 - Etablissement du Bureau de Charité, 1777-1778 and C 2026 - Maison d'Ostende, correspondance ministérielle, 1767-1787.

expand their network of practical information by entering into correspondence with the agricultural societies recently established under the influence of Bertin. In all his contacts with the society the new intendant gave its members every reason to believe that he regarded them as a kind of consultative body on whom he would rely for the information and insight he needed to administer the province wisely. He took particular interest in their assessment of the scope and scale of the economic problems in the province and relied upon society members to provide accurate information about the region's poor and to supervise or suggest projects to relieve public distress or to promote training for Châlons's artisans and workers.⁷⁶ His encouragement and support for the Châlons literary society, as for the Academy, thus appear to have been an integral part of his plan for influencing public opinion and effecting significant reform which did not always enjoy sustained support from those in central government. This seems to have been particularly true of his efforts to relieve the burdens on the province's poor and indigent.

From the literary society's records we know that in the year that d'Orfeuil arrived in Champagne, its members were once again discussing the reasons for the rural exodus and reflecting on what could be done to help the poorest inhabitants of Champagne's most unproductive regions.⁷⁷ That same year d'Orfeuil was studiously avoiding all attempts by the then Controller-General L'Averdy to enforce draconian new government legislation directed against the begging poor. In 1764 the government had appointed a new commission to reconsider government policy towards beggars and vagabonds. As a result of its findings, the already harsh and repressive

⁷⁶ AD Marne C 1 1738 (cited in Olejniczak) and AD Marne C 1768, I J 195 and 210 and Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons MSS 674 and 1239.

⁷⁷ Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 1280.

legislation which the Crown had introduced earlier in the century was made harsher still.⁷⁸ In stiffening these already severe penalties, L'Averdy's commission condemned first-time offenders to the galleys for 3 years, for 9 years for a second offence, for life for the third. Beggars, male and female, too old, too young, too weak or too infirm to work were condemned to confinement for comparable periods at each arrest in new institutions called dépôts de mendicité which were to be established for this purpose throughout the country. The only concession L'Averdy's commission made to the growing ranks of French poor was an extension of the time which the beggar was given to find work; but in giving the indigent not a fortnight but six months to find employment, the government was in fact tacitly admitting that in the last years of Louis XV's reign work could not be easily obtained; the edict calling for the creation of the dépôts was an acknowledgment that existing facilities were inadequate to contain the growing numbers of truly desperate poor.⁷⁹

A circular of September 1764 advised Rouillé d'Orfeuil and all the other intendants to establish dépôts de mendicité in their generalities.

⁷⁸ Laws introduced at the beginning of the century (1700-01) had condemned those apprehended twice for begging to the galleys. Edicts of 1718, 1719 and 1720 provided for the deportation of beggars in chain gangs to Mississippi and a law of 18 July 1724 -- which remained in force for forty years -- unabashedly combined assistance and repression, ordering 'invalid' beggars to the death houses the eighteenth-century politely called 'hospitals' and the valid to find work in a fortnight or else be confined like condemned criminals, fed on bread and water, and at the end of their stay branded with the letter 'M' (for mendiant). Those stopped for begging a third time were dispatched to the galleys for five years. See Hufton, The Poor, pp. 155-57 and 225.

⁷⁹ Bloch, L'Assistance et l'État, p. 164. On the L'Averdy commission see Ira O. Wade, 'Poverty in the Enlightenment', Sonderdruck aus Europäische Aufklärung (Munich, Wilhelm Fink, 1966), pp. 317-23, Hufton, The Poor, pp. 226-28 and Thomas M. Adams, Bureaucrats and Beggars: French Social Policy in the Age of the Enlightenment (New York - Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990), 5, 30, 33, 43-48. On the eighteenth-century hospital, see Jean-Pierre Gutton, La Société et les pauvres: L'exemple de la généralité de Lyon 1534-1789 (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1970), pp. 439-40.

But the Champagne intendant responded by doing nothing -- a policy which he doggedly pursued until 1767 when the government ordered the establishment of a dépôt in Châlons by an arrêt de conseil of 21 October.⁸⁰ D'Orfeuil's obstinacy in this, coupled with his known objections to the abuses of the maréchaussée in its arbitrary arrest of the poor, reveal in this opponent of the treatment to be meted out to those detained in the dépôt both a precursor of Turgot a decade before the latter closed down the majority of these repressive establishments⁸¹ and an undoubted influence on the Châlons Academy, which would initiate its annual essay competitions with a question focusing public attention on the plight of France's indigent.

D'Orfeuil was eventually forced to establish the Châlons dépôt. However, by this time the stubborn refusal, over a period of three years, of Champagne's Intendant to bend to the ministerial will had provided the notables of Châlons with an important lesson in political opposition which did not end with the establishment of the dépôt, for in his interpretation of ministerial instructions d'Orfeuil resisted all pressure to implement policies or to enforce royal regulations when he felt these violated basic human rights or threatened social order in the province for which he was

⁸⁰ Dépôts were eventually established at Alençon, Abbeville, Bernay, Blois, Boulogne, Bourges, Caen, Caudebec, Châlons, Chartres, Digne, Dreux, Evreux, Grenoble, Laon, Lyon, Meaux, Melun, Montargis, Montpellier, Moulins, Orléans, Pontoise, Rennes, Riom, Rodez, Rouen, Tours, Saint-Denis, Senlis, Sens, Soissons, Toulouse, Vannes and Verneuil. By the end of the Old Regime there were only eleven left, notably Châlons, Soissons, Amiens (which had a terrible reputation for its inhumanity, its extremely bad food and a total absence of heat), Rouen, Saint-Denis and Orléans. Bloch, L'Assistance et l'état, p. 169; Hufton, The Poor, 227-44; Gutton, La Société, pp. 462-65.

⁸¹ AD Marne C 1997-98, cited by Marie-Édith Bréjon de Lavergnée, 'Le Dépôt de Mendicité d'Ostende à Châlons-sur Marne à la fin du XVIII^e siècle', *Mémoire pour le D.E.S. de Droit public*, Université de Reims, 1976, pp. 65-66. The Châlons dépôt was among the five that remained open during the administration of Turgot as Controller-General.

responsible. Although this was especially true with regard to the way d'Orfeuil interpreted the instructions he was given for the administration of the Châlons dépôt de mendicité, it was, as we shall see, also true of the way in which he interpreted and moderated ministerial directives if, before issuing his own administrative instructions to Champagne's subdélégués, tax collectors, Ponts et chaussées inspectors and city fathers, he considered that the enforcement of the laws or the imposition of fiscal burdens being asked of them would pose intolerable burdens on labouring people. His attitude and example and the unfailing support he gave to the Academy even after it had incurred the wrath of France's most senior ministers would prove crucial elements in the Academy's own determination to press on, despite official and privileged opposition, in its struggle to influence opinion in favour of reforms that would help ordinary people. D'Orfeuil's attitude to the Châlons dépôt was perhaps one of the earliest lessons in persistent opposition he gave them.

Despite L'Averdy's strenuous objections -- and in marked contrast to the harsh practices employed elsewhere -- Champagne's Intendant insisted upon indulgence vis-à-vis those interned in Châlons's dépôt and insured that its administrators maintained standards of health, nutrition and sanitation which were sometimes better and probably more certain than many of its inmates had known outside of it.⁸² Much to L'Averdy's fury,

⁸² AD Marne C 2030 - letter from Rouillé d'Orfeuil dated 7 November 1771, quoted by Bréjon de Lavergnée, p. 83. Although L'Averdy complained about the cost, d'Orfeuil instructed that detainees were to be given 4-8 oz. of meat, vegetables and rice every week plus limited amounts of white bread, wine, beer and cider with an extra ration of milk for the children and ill, as well as fresh straw every ten days for inmates' mattresses. The provision of fresh bedding in Châlons, a practice also adopted in the model dépôt at Soissons, was according to its director Montlinot (a competitor in the Academy's first competition on the plight of the beggar), 'la couche ordinaire des pays de la généralité'. AD Marne C 2030 and Imprimé sur l'état actuel de la maison de travail de la généralité de Soissons en 1781, chapter III 'Ameublement', cited in Ibid, p. 136

d'Orfeuil even asked for government funds to establish a garden where vegetables could be grown for detainees.⁸³ In other dépôts, frequently run by entrepreneurs who kept inmates in the poorest conditions with minimal food and often non-existent heating or medical care, there was often no room to establish the ateliers where the L'Averdy commission had hoped inmates could work to cover the cost of their keep. High mortality rates were often the norm -- in some dépôts over a quarter perished while in custody. But in Châlons, as would be the case in the model dépôt Necker would establish at Soissons, the emphasis was on rehabilitation rather than punishment. And although detainees were obliged to work for their keep, they were given half the product of their labour. So successful was this paid work-incentive plan that in Châlons male detainees asked to be allowed to work later than required on short winter days to earn more money to buy tobacco.⁸⁴

Under d'Orfeuil's instructions the doctor Joseph Gellée, who was a member of both the literary and academic societies, made regular visits to the dépôt (AD Marne C 1748). The Intendant even arranged for some of the ill to take the waters at Bourbonne. It was also arranged that a mid-wife was to be present at all births in the dépôt. After an initial period, foundlings and other children admitted into the Châlons dépôt were sent into the countryside to be nursed and, when they were older, either placed with peasants in the countryside or apprenticed to artisans. AD Marne C 2027 and C 2052-3, cited in Bloch, L'Assistance, p. 176.

⁸³ AD Marne C 2030.

⁸⁴ AD Marne C 2026, pièce 100. L'Averdy objected to d'Orfeuil's administration and insisted that treatment be tougher. The minister's comments on pay for detainees reflect his understanding of how tenuous was the economic circumstance of the ordinary peasant outside the dépôts: 'Je concens volontiers à abandonner aux renfermés la moitié du produit de leur main d'oeuvre quoiqu'il y aurait peut-être plus d'avantage à leur permettre un ou deux sols par jour proportionnellement au travail qu'ils auraient fait attendu que si ces gens se trouvaient nourris au compte du roi et gagner encore honnêtement, il serait à craindre qu'ils ne deviennent plus heureux que les autres habitants de la campagne qui outre la peine qu'ils se donnent ont encore l'inquiétude au lendemain. Or je pense qu'ils est nécessaire de leur faire sentir qu'ils sont renfermés pour correction pour tâches, s'il est possible de les rendre aux travaux de la terre pour lesquels ils sont faits.' AD Marne 2026, pièce 92, quoted by Bréjon de Lavergnée, p. 168.

The Champagne Intendant's attitude to those detained in the Châlons dépôt -- an attitude we will see reflected again and again in the essays submitted to the Châlons Academy -- proceeded from a conviction he shared with Châlons's municipal authorities and the members of its learned society: that the majority there were not, as some ministers would have it, the criminal poor but rather desperate people who had turned to begging only when they failed to find work or when they lost their tenuous hold on insubstantial scraps of land. The records of the dépôt at Châlons bear out d'Orfeuil's contention that the absence of work --- and not of personal initiative -- was most frequently the key to a beggar's arrest: 'Nombreux sont ces mendiants domiciliés ou même de profession qui sur les états dressés par les brigades sont mentionnés comme d'anciens manoeuvriers, journaliers, cardeurs de laine, chanvriers, etc.'⁸⁵ The dépôt in Châlons was a model of reform in large measure because of d'Orfeuil's conviction, based on observation and report, that in his poor province poverty was not primarily a moral problem but rather a structural one. This belief was the

For confirmation of the humane treatment afforded those detained in the Châlons dépôt and of its administrators' attention to the rehabilitation of inmates and the inculcation of the values of civil society, including respect for those who by necessity had been forced outside its bounds, see William J. Olejniczak, 'Recasting the Disordered Poor: The dépôt de mendicité at Châlons-sur-Marne during the Decade before the Revolution', in the 1984 Proceedings of the Consortium on Revolutionary Europe, 1750-1850 (Athens, Georgia, 1986), pp. 16-25.

⁸⁵ Ad Marne C 1997-1998. Hufton's analyses of those detained in other dépôts confirm this view; dividing those detained into social and economic categories, she found that the 'mix' in a dépôt at any one time would consist of between 30-40% rural journaliers, whose seasonal work was finished, and 30% unemployed ouvriers with the rest being made up by itinerant traders, prostitutes, the insane, children and the aged. Hufton, The Poor, pp. 239-39. Cissie Fairchilds, in her study of the dépôt in Aix-en-Provence, found that about half of those interned there could not really be classified as criminal beggars or illegal vagrants. Poverty and Charity in Aix-en-Provence, 1640-1789 (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). For a contrasting view of the inmates of France's dépôts during the early years of the Revolution see Alan Forrest, The French Revolution and the Poor (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1981), pp. 88-94.

well-spring of his initiatives in Champagne. His attentiveness, in the words of the Société littéraire, to 'pourvoir aux besoins du peuple' was more than just an echo of policy directives from the central government.⁸⁶

In Champagne economic crises were frequent and gave d'Orfeuil wide scope for his humanitarian administrative reforms. In 1770, when the cycle of bad harvests began reducing large numbers of both journaliers and laboureurs to indigency, begging and even crime, the Champagne intendant sought to implement or inspire reforms designed to assist the poorest of the province's labouring poor. First, he exempted families with ten legitimate children from billeting troops (which, in a military centre like Châlons, was often a crushing burden for the people); and he recommended that in imposing the capitation on these families the government take into consideration the 'facultés' and the 'situation de leur nombreuse famille'.⁸⁷ In his communications with ministers D'Orfeuil was consistent in his recommendation that fiscal obligations be related to ability to pay. He was candidly critical of the whole basis on which the corvée was assessed and administered, writing in 1775: 'Je suis intimement persuadé qu'il n'y a point d'opération plus nécessaire au soulagement du peuple que le changement de l'administration des corvées des chemins [...]'; and, in a letter to Turgot, recommending that the money for the construction and

⁸⁶ The quotation comes from the society's hymn of praise to its protector, 11 April 1768, cited by Menu, Notes historiques, p. 36.

⁸⁷ Amédée Lhote and Armand Bourgeois, Essais biographiques sur quelques intendants de Champagne (Châlons-sur-Marne, Imprimerie Librairie de l'Union républicaine, 1900), pp. 13-14. D'Orfeuil also organized courses to train rural sages femmes, using relief from the corvée and taille as incentives to attract peasant women to complete the courses. AD Marne C 2664 and C 359 and Mémoires secrètes de Bachaumont, t. XXVII, pp. 63-64 (18 January 1785). He enlisted the help of village curés, asking them through a circular letter to encourage poor women who wanted to be mid-wives to attend the course by explaining that they would be housed free in Châlons for the two months the course would run and that they would receive a weekly stipend of 12 livres. AD Marne C 355 and 358, cited by Bloch, L'Assistance et l'État, p. 249.

maintenance of roads should come not just from a tax on rural landowners, from which, currently, 'les habitants des principales villes [...] sont en même temps exempts de taille [et] dispensés des travaux publics', but by impositions on négociants, merchants, artisans and even day labourers (but in strict proportion to their means) as well as on clergy, nobles and on lands belonging to the king and royal princes.⁸⁸ Even after the failure of Turgot's legal reform of the corvée, d'Orfeuil, from the mid-seventies on, counselled his subdélégués to substitute 'la plus grande douceur' for the existing 'rigidité contre les corvéables' in view of 'les circonstances fâcheuses dans lesquelles nous nous trouvons eu égard à la cherté du pain.'⁸⁹ And when in 1785 his province was again hit with severe scarcity, d'Orfeuil forbade his subdélégués to require the corvée at all until the worst of the crisis had passed.⁹⁰

Concurrent with his attempts to reduce the burdens on the agricultural labourer were his efforts to reform public and private assistance. In 1770 he took the initiative in organizing bureaux de charité in Champagne. So when, later, Necker and Bertin routinely encouraged him to organize alms bureaux in every Champagne town and parish,⁹¹ d'Orfeuil reminded the ministry that he had already been doing this for more than a decade.

Depuis dix ans je n'ai cessé de donner tous mes soins et mon attention à l'objet important de la mendicité [...]. Dans ma dernière tournée en Champagne, j'ai mis tout en usage dans les villes où je suis passé pour exciter les magistrats qui sont chargés de la

⁸⁸ Schelle, Oeuvres de Turgot, IV, 540.

⁸⁹ AD Marne C 1549 - letter of Rouillé d'Orfeuil to the Reims subdélégué Polonceau, April 1775, written in response to Polonceau's 'Avis pour les corvées'.

⁹⁰ AD Marne C 1552.

⁹¹ Leon Lallemand, Quinze années de réforme hospitalières (1774-1789) (Paris, A. Picard et fils, 1898), p. 18.

police ainsi que les curés des paroisses à s'occuper avec zèle de la formation des Bureaux d'Aumônes.⁹²

In a circular to his subdélégués he recommended that the 'Bureaux d'Aumônes' be 'composés dans les campagnes du seigneur ou de son agent, du curé et des habitants les plus riches, et dans les villes des principaux magistrats, des curés et des autres personnes recommandables'. If the voluntary donations of the province's rich and privileged proved insufficient to 'procurer aux pauvres les secours convenables', the intendant assured his officials of his willingness to 'me joindre avec plaisir à ceux dont les moyens ne seraient pas suffisants et je les aiderai de l'autorité et des fonds que le Roi a bien voulu me confier'. D'Orfeuil, sharing the impulses of both Turgot and Necker, insisted that the promised aid should not be limited to food but should include raw materials and tools and even money to help the poor get back on their feet: 'Je distribuerai avec abondance des remèdes, du riz, des matières et des outils pour le travail et même de l'argent quand cela serait nécessaire'.⁹³

Throughout his intendency Rouillé d'Orfeuil demonstrated genuine concern for the poor, both those in work and bearing heavy tax burdens and those forced to rely on formal assistance because of deteriorating economic circumstance. During the catastrophic winter of 1783-4 the intendant sent the following letter to the municipal officers throughout the province:

Quoique je sois persuadé, messieurs, que l'extrême rigueur de la saison et la cherté des grains excitent puissamment votre sollicitude envers les pauvres de votre ville, qui manquent d'ouvrage et de nourriture, je crois devoir vous prier de vouloir bien me faire part, au reçu de cette lettre, des différentes mesures que vous avez prises à cet égard.

Obviously not content to leave public assistance to chance, he added,

⁹² AD Marne C 2005.

⁹³ Ibid.

rien ne doit vous arrêter pour remplir des soins aussi chers à la religion et à l'humanité; appréciez, Messieurs, toutes les horreurs de la saison et du froid, songez que ces deux fléaux pressent dans ce moment sur vos concitoyens, sur vos semblables, prévoyez tous les maux qui peuvent en être la suite; et voyez s'il y a des considérations qui puissent vous dispenser d'employer tous les moyens qui sont en votre pouvoir pour les prévenir.⁹⁴

D'Orfeuil recommended the establishment of public works projects, ateliers, for all able-bodied unemployed, and public warming rooms, chauffoirs, for those too poor to heat their dwellings. Again addressing local magistrates and municipal officers, which included several members of the Châlons Academy, he wrote:

Réfléchissez, je vous prie, Messieurs, que la circonstance est on ne pourrait plus impérieuse, et qu'il n'y a point de disposition ni de motifs d'économie qui ne doivent lui céder. Suspendez vos ouvrages les moins pressés, retardez le paiement de vos charges ordinaires, empruntez s'il le faut, mais faites en sorte que vos pauvres et vos ouvriers ne manquent point de subsistances.⁹⁵

Like their intendant, members of Châlons's learned society who were also on the town council were increasingly preoccupied by the mounting number of poor in their town and province. Although in 1770 the council arranged for bread to be distributed twice a week to the town's poor and appointed an almoner systematically to collect donations for this purpose, they recorded their fear that 'la charité passera avec le temps en taxes de ville et de police. C'est un intendant, un maire, des échevins qui s'en mêlent tout seuls'.⁹⁶ The intendant had instructed subdélégués, town councillors and churchmen to aid the poor as much as possible and had promised help from the central government to fund relief.

⁹⁴ Archives nationales H 1420 - Administration provinciale. Liasse - Secours du roi.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ The statement was made to the council by the president of Châlons's presidial court Morel and is quoted in Poinson, Histoire générale, III, 356.

But concurrent with these measures of public assistance d'Orfeuil also began to pour renewed energy into his efforts to gain official status as a royal academy for Châlons's Société littéraire. In letters to the ministry he described its members' untiring efforts in pursuit of what was useful and insisted that it was to their credit that improved agricultural techniques had been adopted in the province.⁹⁷ D'Orfeuil now hoped to use this body to engage a larger public in the consideration of measures which might influence those with the power to introduce reforms to adopt measures that would reduce the burdens bearing down upon the labouring poor and provide work for those who had fallen into indigency.⁹⁸

Through his good offices the literary society in 1770 submitted to Louis XV and his ministers a list of its members and an impressive catalogue of all the useful projects the society had undertaken over the previous quarter century. An official document prepared by the Academy for Crown officials early in Louis XVI's reign records that Louis XV had indeed granted their request: 'sa Majesté se seroit déterminée en 1770 à accorder à cette société des lettres patentes qui à raison de circonstances particulières n'ont point été registrées dans le tems'.⁹⁹ This document

⁹⁷ 'Cette académie dont la ferveur pour le travail sur des objets d'utilité ne s'est jamais rallentie [...] ne s'est occupé jusques à présent que d'objets intéressants et [...] la plus part de ses ouvrages même agréables ont un point de vue d'utilité. Je ne dois pas ainsy vous dissimuler que je me suis rendu certain que c'est à cette académie que l'on est redevable de la culture abondante que se fait actuellement dans la province de Champagne en sainfoin et autres prairies artificielles.' AD Marne C 1768.

⁹⁸ In a letter to the ministry, dated 3 July 1777, D'Orfeuil admitted that his support (and his assurance to the society that he would personally underwrite the cost of the two prizes) had been the crucial factor in the Academy's selection of its first two public essay contest questions: on the plight of the begging poor and on reforms which would see that the forced free labour required by the corvée was replaced by a system offering the unemployed paid labour on national roads. AD Marne C 1768.

⁹⁹ AD Marne C 1768 - Extrait des registres des délibérations de l'Académie[...] du mai 1777.

offers no further explanation about what these 'circonstances' were, but it is perhaps not unreasonable to speculate that they may have been related to the dismissal of Choiseul and the subsequent exile by Maupeou of the Paris Parlement, the break-up of its jurisdiction, the abolition of its magistrates' venal offices, and the creation in their place of the new subordinate courts, conseils supérieurs, one of which was established at Châlons and to which D'Orfeuil, with Maupeou's full support, appointed five of Châlons's would-be academicians.¹⁰⁰ Whatever the explanation for the non-registration of the authorizing letters, the Châlons society and its Intendant and president would have to wait another five years for the academic recognition they sought.¹⁰¹

On the death of Louis XV and the accession of the new king the Châlons society hastened to reapply for official recognition as an academic body, once again through the good offices of Rouillé d'Orfeuil. Though they had suffered a setback when they failed to achieve academic status under Louis XV, the Châlonnais had witnessed in the work of Bertin, Maupeou and Terray and, most recently, of Turgot, serious attempts by senior government ministers to introduce reforms in the economy, in finance, in administration, in justice and in poor relief;¹⁰² and although these

¹⁰⁰ Villers, L'Organisation du Parlement de Paris, pp. 159-64.

¹⁰¹ That the learned society continued to hope throughout this interim period that the letters-patent granted them by Louis XV would eventually be officially registered is proven both by the society's minutes, which indicate that one of its associates was commissioned in 1772 to design a seal for the new academy, and by the academy's official cartouche, which was hung in its meeting room and used as the design for the academy's seal; it carried this claim: LUDOVICUS XV STABILIT - LUDOVICUS XVI INSTITUIT. Menu, La Société littéraire, p. 62 and Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons - MS 1280 which lists a manuscript, dated 1772, entitled 'Observations sur le sujet du sceau de l'Académie des Sciences, Arts, et Belles lettres de Chaalons par M. Grignon'.

¹⁰² Turgot's initiatives in matters of poor relief were welcomed by d'Orfeuil who, along with Châlons's bishop (Malvaux's immediate superior), had been involved in the inquiries set up by the commission which Turgot

reforms were in some instances only briefly essayed they had, like the reforms the society had observed at the hands of Rouillé d'Orfeuil, instilled in these local notables an unquenchable optimism about the prospects for reform and convinced them that in the very highest circles of government there existed a will to reform that only needed the enlightened support of reform-minded men to become a lasting reality.

In the years during which the Academy waited for official registration of their letters-patent members had seen Maupeou dismember the jurisdiction of the Paris Parlement and replace its magistrates with salaried officials dispensing free justice; they had witnessed Terray's efforts to introduce reforms in the assessment and collection of the vingtième and capitation, his imposition of new taxes on venal offices and his abolition of other venal offices altogether, as well as his action forcing the Farmers General to accept a new lease on indirect taxes more favourable to the Crown. These reforms, undertaken by ministers of central government and seemingly grounded in some of the same attitudes which they had observed in the actions of their own Intendant, persuaded the men from Châlons that the Crown was willing to undertake reforms that implied a fundamental reconsideration of the assumptions of a society of orders and to demonstrate a new commitment by the Crown to attend to the needs of France's labouring people.

This practical commitment of the King to his people they had seen worked out first-hand in the administration of Champagne's intendant. As officials in the royal administration many of the society's members had

established in 1774 to study the problem of mendicity. Turgot was among the first of the honorary members named by the Châlons Academy along with Loménie de Brienne and Trudaine, two of the men Turgot had appointed to his investigative commission of 1774. The findings and recommendations of the Turgot commission are contained in BN fonds français 8129-8130 - Recueil sur la mendicité fait sur l'ordre de Turgot.

taken part in the implementation of reforms introduced in their own courts or tax offices during the years of intense reform under Maupeou and Terray and the administration of Rouillé d'Orfeuil; other members had been asked as doctors or clergy to cooperate with the Intendant in his efforts to improve public health or supply the needs of the province's indigent. D'Orfeuil's resistance to ministerial pressure to enforce harsh policies against the indigent, his establishment of Châlons's Conseil supérieur in the face of the opposition of France's most senior magistrates (many of whose members had been in exile in the region),¹⁰³ and his implementation and interpretation of the other fiscal, judicial and administrative reforms of Maupeou, Terray and Turgot, all seem to have convinced the men from Châlons that the Crown was willing seriously to consider reforms that would make government both more efficient and less oppressive for ordinary Frenchmen while ultimately undermining the power and privilege of vested interests.

So at last in August of 1775, at a time when all of France was experiencing the euphoria of a new reign and a young king who promised to 'donner à ses peuples des preuves de son amour paternel et de son attention pour tout ce qui peut contribuer à leur soulagement et à leur conservation',¹⁰⁴ Louis XVI issued the edict transforming the Châlons

¹⁰³ Villers, L'Organisation du Parlement de Paris, pp. 139 and 160.

¹⁰⁴ 'Edit de 1776 sur les boîtes de remèdes distribuées dans les provinces' in Daire, Oeuvres de Turgot, II, 472. With his every act the new king reminded the public of his 'attention au bonheur du peuple' See, for example, the preambles to the following edicts: in 1774, the 'édit fondant l'hospice des écoles de chirurgie'; in 1776, 'édit sur la liberté du commerce des vins'; and in 1777, 'arrêt du 17 août 1777 nommant une commission de réforme des hôpitaux'. Comments contained in the essays submitted by the public to the Châlons Academy provide evidence of the effectiveness of these preambles in conveying this message from the Crown to ordinary Frenchmen.

One example of many in the essays will serve as an illustration of the influence the preambles to government edicts had in persuading the Châlons essayists -- and the influential permanent secretary of the Châlons Academy

literary society into a royal academy. His recognition of their work over the previous quarter century seemed to them but one more indication of the royal preoccupation with promoting the public welfare, for by the privileges he granted them Louis XVI appeared to be both endorsing their past efforts to work for the public good and encouraging them to pursue their commitment to public utility with all the authority and influence of a royal academy. He was, as well, authorizing them as members of an official body to enter into direct contact with the literate public through publications which would not be subject to censors and to engage the public in their inquiries by allowing the Academy to hold annual public essay competitions on topics of its own choosing.

When Louis XVI signed the letters-patent which transformed their local literary society into the Académie des Sciences, Arts et Belles-Lettres de Châlons-sur-Marne, he permitted its members to make their first formal entrance on the national stage, behind them the power and prestige bestowed by the heritage of more than a century of academic activity, before them the promise of a future of public service made possible, indeed tangible, in the letter of personal approbation and encouragement sent to the Châlonnais by their young king. On the 22nd of May 1776 members of the society, sitting formally for the first time as a royal academy, heard their director, the Abbé Malvaux, read the following from a document signed by Louis XVI himself.

-- of Louis's devotion to the interests of his people. Sabbathier, as a competitor in the Academy's first competition, wrote of the edict suppressing the corvée, after its reversal: 'il est impossible de penser que l'intention du Gouvernement soit de rétablir pour toujours un usage, dont il a si bien développé le vice & l'iniquité dans le préambule de l'Édit de février. Pour être rassuré, il ne faut que se rappeler ce préambule si touchant, où le Monarque plaidant avec tant d'énergie la cause de ses sujets les plus dignes de son humanité, par une heureuse méfiance de lui-même, a paru vouloir employer tout ce qu'il y avoit de plus propre à l'engager vis-à-vis de la Nation.' AD Marne I J 40, No. 70.

LOUIS, par la Grâce de Dieu, Roi de France et de Navarre: A tous présens et à venir, Salut. Ayant été informés il y a déjà quelque tems que plusieurs Gens de Lettres de notre Ville de Chaalons-sur-Marne s'y étoient réunis, sous le titre de Société Littéraire, à un nombre d'Amateurs des Sciences et des Arts pour les cultiver et les perfectionner par leurs travaux réciproques, Nous approuvâmes dès-lors un établissement, dont le but étoit si conforme au désir que Nous avons toujours eu de favoriser le progrès des Sciences, et d'encourager ceux qui se livrent à des études utiles. Nous nous sommes fait rendre compte des différentes occupations auxquelles cette Société s'est livrée, et Nous avons vu avec beaucoup de satisfaction qu'elle s'est toujours appliquée à des objets relatifs à l'utilité publique, que plusieurs de ceux qui la composent se sont déjà acquis par leurs travaux littéraires une réputation, qui donne lieu d'espérer que cette Société étant affermie et soutenue par notre autorité contribuera à l'avancement des Sciences et des Arts dans notre Royaume, et Nous nous sommes déterminés d'autant plus volontiers à confirmer pour toujours cet établissement, que c'est donner à notre Province de Champagne une preuve de notre protection spéciale, et un nouveau témoignage de notre bienveillance pour une Ville qui s'en est toujours rendue digne par sa fidélité et son attachement à notre Couronne.

Henceforth, the document continued, Louis XVI would afford his academicians at Châlons the same status, honour, privileges and liberties that Louis XIV had bestowed upon the members of the great academies in Paris.¹⁰⁵

Although the letters-patent granted the new academy only very specific rights and duties and provided guidelines from which it could depart only at the risk of losing these rights, the Academy had at last gained official recognition and thereby the privilege of a public life. The Statutes which accompanied the Academy's letters patent made it clear that the Crown intended its latest royal academy to be a working body, the main focus of whose activities was to be the discovery and propagation of information or

¹⁰⁵ 'Ordonnons que lesdits Académiciens jouiront des mêmes honneurs, privilèges, prérogatives, franchises et libertés dont jouissent les Membres des Académies établies dans notre Ville de Paris.'

This and the previous quotation are taken from the 'Lettres patentes du Roi portant érection de la Société littéraire de Chaalons-sur-Marne en Académie des Sciences, Arts et Belles-Lettres, données à Versailles au mois d'Août 1775, registrées au Parlement de Paris, le 18 mars 1776, lues et registrées à l'Académie de Chaalons, le 22 mai 1776' - AD Marne I J 195.

practices in the sciences, arts and, particularly, agriculture, which its members believed would be useful to the public.¹⁰⁶

To this end the new Academy was to be awarded a privilège générale which would permit it to print and to sell throughout France not only the works of its members and the proceedings of its meetings, public or private, but also any other work which 'ladite Académie voudra faire paroître en son nom'. Principal among these would be the essays submitted by the public for the annual essay competitions which the Academy already proposed to hold each year on subjects directly related to the work of public utility to which it purposed to devote itself. The terms in which this privilege was granted reflect the importance which the Châlons Academy attributed to this aspect of its public work.

Notre bien aimée l'Académie Royale des Sciences, Belles-Lettres et Arts de Chaalons-sur-Marne nous a fait exposer qu[']elle avoit besoin de nos Lettres de Privilège pour faire imprimer [...] les pièces qui lui [...] pourront être adressés pour les concours des prix qu'elle

¹⁰⁶ As was true for all royal academies, the activities of the Academy at Châlons were legally and strictly controlled in the most minute detail by government regulation. Among the 'règlements' imposed upon the Academy with its letters-patent we find: the number of titular members (20), the imposition of the province's governor, intendant and the bishop as protector and presidents, the meeting place (the Châlons hôtel de ville), the day and even the hour of its weekly meetings, the rules and order for voting, the number for a quorum and mandatory attendance requirements, the obligation of members to record and sign the minutes of meetings, the date of the annual public meeting (25 August, the 'fête de Saint Louis') which was to be opened with a mass, the number of 'examineurs' responsible for approving each public statement and even the opening and closing dates of the academy's autumn and Easter adjournments.

The twenty titular members, who were to be resident in Châlons or near enough 'pour pouvoir facilement assister chaque semaine aux assemblées' (Statute XI), were to meet together every Wednesday from four to six pm (Statute VIII) [in fact, because so many members found that their professional and administrative obligations made it impossible to arrive for four, the Academy eventually voted to begin their meetings an hour later than originally instructed in the Statutes] and to devote themselves to the discovery and propagation of the useful: 'L'Académie ne négligera rien pour se procurer autant qu'il lui sera possible, la connoissance des inventions et decouvertes utiles sur-tout dans la Province de Champagne, relativement aux Sciences, aux Arts, et particulièrement à l'Agriculture. Elle se chargera même de les publier et d'en rendre compte chaque année dans ses séances publiques'. (Statute XXIV). Ibid.

distribue: à ces causes [...] nous lui permettons [...] de faire imprimer et de faire vendre ou débiter par tout notre royaume, tous les ouvrages [...] qu'elle pourroit approuver parmi les pièces au concours pour les prix qu'elle distribue.¹⁰⁷

In a society which was still officially apolitical and in which the privilege to publish remained, at least formally, the prerogative of the Crown, this document marked the true beginning of Châlons Academy's public life, according it precious access to the French public and, potentially, to those with the power to influence significant reform. Taken together with Louis XVI's grant of letters patent to their society, a body whose members had for a quarter century devoted so much of their activities to the promotion of the social and economic well-being of the labouring people of their province, the Châlons Academy's new status and privileges reinforced the impression shared by its members that, like the reforming Intendant who presided over their province, their young king was attentive to any project that would serve to promote the welfare of his people. Thus, with the blessing of the king and an optimism which betrayed their inexperience on the national political stage, the Châlons academicians threw themselves into preparations for their first public essay competitions.

¹⁰⁷ AD Marne I J 195 - Privilège général.

PART TWO

THE PUBLIC ESSAY COMPETITOR

III

THE COMPETITORS IN THE CHALONS CONTESTS

A competitor in the public essay contests of the Châlons Academy had to meet only three conditions: to be literate, to be aware of some of the social and economic problems being faced by ordinary Frenchmen, and to be possessed of the desire to contribute to their solution by penning a written response to the Academy's question and sending it to Châlons in time to be judged. The only formal requirement was the date for submission. The Châlons academicians simply invited all those who believed they had something useful to contribute to the issue at hand to submit their views to them. Members placed advertisements in the leading journals,¹ printed and distributed fliers, and maintained an active correspondence with other academic, literary and agricultural societies and with interested individuals,² exploiting their various contacts to

¹ Competitors in the Academy's contests themselves mention having read an announcement of the competition questions in one or the other of the following journals: the Gazette de France (9, 11 December 1776; 18 September 1778, 3 December 1779; 19 September 1778; 12 September 1780 and 19 September 1783); the Mercure de France (15 December 1778 and 13 December 1779); the Affiches de Paris pour les provinces (October 1780); the Journal de Bouillon (June 1775; February 1782); the Journal d'éducation (January 1778); the Journal de Genève (19 January 1782; 11 October 1783); the Journal politique (1-15 February 1782); the Gazette de Tribunaux and the Journal Courrier de l'Europe (1781, No. 9), the Journal de Bruxelles (January 1783). Notices also appeared in the Mémoires de Bachaumont ou Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la république des lettres en France, the Journal de Physique of the Abbé Rozé and the Année littéraire of Fréron.

² Although the number of Châlons essayists who were members of an academy or agricultural society is small, the correspondence between these bodies and the Châlons Academy undoubtedly contributed to the diffusion of the Academy's essay contest topics. Of the identified essayists, 83 came from (21) towns having either an agricultural society or an academy.

publicize their contest questions and to ensure the largest possible public participation in the Academy's competitions.

The social utilitarian orientation of the Academy's questions and its seemingly sincere effort to consider the reformist opinion of any literate Frenchman, as long as it was 'praticable et utile', quickly convinced the public that the Châlons Academy differed from most other academies. In 1781 the future people's mayor of Paris and Châlons essayist Petion de Villeneuve wrote to the Academy's permanent secretary Sabbathier to express sentiments shared by many of its contest competitors:

Monsieur, il est une chose qui distingue honorablement votre académie d'une foule des sociétés littéraires: c'est son zèle et son application assidue à se rendre utile au genre humain. Qu'importe au bonheur de l'homme toutes ces questions oiseuses que ces corps littéraires semblent prendre à tâche de présenter au public.

All that issued from the literary exercises of most such societies were 'quelques mots sonores qui prouvent les talents de l'orateur' and these did nothing, Petion remarked dismissively, to 'adoucir les maux' which were besetting the France outside their golden circle.³

Petion's was a refrain common to many of the essays received by the Châlons Academy. Competitors writing for its contests professed disgust for those of the cultural and intellectual elite who merely 'couchent sur les papiers', wasting their energies in the formulation of vacuous 'systèmes' which 'à force d'être universels, [ne] guérissent ordinairement aucuns maux'.⁴ Charles-Joseph Panckoucke, an important Paris publisher and himself actively involved in the business of the enlightenment, prefaced his essay for the Academy's competition on the begging poor with powerful criticism of the 'sociétés littéraires établies en France pour la

³ AD Marne I J 47, letter, dated 15 May 1781, from Petion to Sabbathier.

⁴ AD Marne I J 38 No. 9.

propagation des lumières'; their privileged position was used for nothing more than 'la discussion des sujets futiles ou simplement agréables'. According to him, their activities were not merely useless; they were actively harmful because their 'jeux d'esprit entretiennent la frivolité de la nation sans la rendre plus éclairée sur ses véritables intérêts'. Using words to gloss over the social and economic problems which in their country were the daily anguish of 'une nombreuse portion d'hommes', those who sat in these privileged societies by their public competitions succeeded only in distracting those best qualified to understand these problems from directing their attention to finding practical solutions 'vraiment utiles à la patrie'. Panckoucke praised the Châlons Academy for its choice of subject and for being one of the few academic societies which 'dirigent leurs vues vers des objets vraiment utiles' before concluding: 'il n'est [...] point de citoyen zélé qui ne doive applaudir ou correspondre à de telle intentions'.⁵

In posing for public discussion in its first competition question a subject which eschewed the literary or philosophical and focused on the political and the useful the Châlons Academy had transferred so-called academic discourse to a higher plane.

L'occupation la plus précieuse des gens des lettres est d'être utile à l'état. Des recherches de pure curiosité peuvent bien faire briller quelquefois l'érudition, l'esprit, le génie de celui qui s'y livre; mais on doit toujours préférer celles qui tendent au bien général.

It was this, continued this essayist,

⁵ AD Marne I J 39 No. 44. I am grateful to Mme Suzanne Tucoc-Chala, author of Charles-Joseph Panckoucke et la librairie française 1736-1789 (Pau, Marrimpouey; Paris, Touzot, 1977) for her assistance in confirming that it was C.-J. Panckoucke, publisher not only of various editions of the Encyclopédie, of the Encyclopédie méthodique, and the Moniteur Universel but also printer-publisher of the Paris Academy of Sciences, who was the Châlons competitor. Thanks to M. Ph. Rossot, conservateur of the Archives du Nord, for having put me in contact with her.

ce qu'à très bien sentie l'Académie des sciences, arts et belles lettres de Chaalons sur Marne, lorsqu'elle a proposé pour sujet la solution du problème politique qui consiste à trouver les moyens de détruire la mendicité en rendant les mendiants utiles à l'état sans les rendre malheureux.⁶

Six years later the Academy's perpetual secretary was still receiving praise for 'les sujets donnés par votre académie en matière de politique et d'administration'.⁷

Judging from the letters it received, the Châlons Academy had succeeded in distinguishing itself in the public's mind as a body dedicated to the useful, even when this involved matters that were political and administrative; it also seems to have persuaded that public of its commitment to bringing the views of enlightened Frenchmen outside the academies before the eyes of the government. An unsigned statement accompanying an essay submitted from Versailles for the Academy's question on the labouring poor quoted in full (and with page references to the revised, 1780 edition) the solemn vow to utility which the academy had sworn to the public in its published résumé of the essays it had received on begging. This correspondent continued:

Votre Académie étoit née à peine qu'elle a montré d'abord le rang qu'elle vouloit tenir, je ne dis pas entre toutes celles de la France, mais je puis l'avancer sans en être contredit, entre toutes les académies de l'Europe: il n'est point de plus patriotique ni de plus chère à l'humanité que la vôtre. Les différens sujets qu'elle a déjà proposés pour rendre les hommes plus heureux et meilleurs, les soins qu'elle s'est donnés en même tems pour tirer de ces sujets tous les avantages possibles; enfin le serment solennel que vous avez fait sur l'autel du bien public de vous y consacrer entièrement tout cela vous assure dans les premiers par l'estime, l'amour et la renconnoissance de tous ceux qui aiment leur [patrie].⁸

⁶ AD Marne I J 41 No. 78. Emphasis added. The writer is the Caen law professor Roussel de la Berardiére.

⁷ AD Marne I J 49, letter of 12 October 1783 from an 'ancien conseiller au parlement de Bordeaux' Goyon d'Arzac.

⁸ AD Marne I J 49 letter dated 31 March 1782. Although the final word is almost illegible, I believe from the context that it is 'patrie'.

What was remarkable, as far as the competitors in the Châlons contests were concerned, was that this royal academy seemed actively committed to the task of focusing public attention on specific social, economic and administrative problems which other privileged bodies in society would rather have left unexamined -- if possible, not even within the closed circles of those who understood what was at stake and, under no circumstances, by reform-minded members of the literate general public. And, yet, the problems set before the public by the Châlons contest questions were so relevant, so topical, indeed, so 'un-academic' that many Frenchmen who would not normally have dared to write for another academy were persuaded to submit their views for consideration by this group of royal academicians.

Emphasizing the human dimension of problems like the corvée and the courts, taxes, administration and the begging and the labouring poor, the Châlons questions by their very wording convinced even the most undistinguished that their views would be welcomed. As one unassuming vicar remarked about the Academy's question for 1782, 'la question présente pouvoit être sans prétension de la compétence d'un curé de campagne'.⁹ Or, as another competitor wrote: 'illustre assemblée [...] comme vous permettez à tous sujets d'y concourir [to the search for practical suggestions for reform] vous y parviendrez'. And then: 'Voicy un des moins éclairés mais qui a le droit d'être un de plus zélés. Enfin voilà que le zèle d'un citoyen a pu dicter quoique grossièrement suivant sa capacité à quoi cependant il se crut autorisé par votre invitation'.¹⁰ By offering

⁹ AD Marne I J 49 No. 17, Pauvert. The curé received a favorable comment from the Academy for his contribution.

¹⁰ AD Marne I J 49 No. 3. Emphasis added. Although the author of this essay, which came from Valenciennes, has not been identified by name, correspondence with the Academy indicates that the writer was probably a woman born on the French frontier and of foreign parents. In a letter

these men and women the opportunity to formalize in a written essay views which might otherwise have gone unformulated and unheard, the Châlons Academy brought their opinions into the public domain and bestowed on their authors a new role as self-chosen but solicited spokesmen of the public will.

The Academy through its essay contests sought out those among educated Frenchmen who recognized with them that the poor and the burdens society forced upon them posed a 'problème politique' which could not be long ignored.¹¹ Composing and compiling essay solutions to what they regarded as pressing public problems, both academicians and essayists were affirming the contributory role they believed that the public could play in reforming abuses and injustices within French society; submitting their essays to those whom they believed had the power to effect these reforms was a confession of their continued faith in the monarch who reigned over them.¹²

[s]he apologized for the faults of spelling and phrasing in her essay. At least five other women are known to have submitted essays for judgement by the Academy: a Mme Eglain from Paris who wrote an essay on the begging poor which arrived too late to be considered for the prize; Angelique Térèse de la Croix, an old woman (very possibly a nun) living in a village, Vic, in Lorraine, who wrote for the competition on the corvée as did 'les filles Du Peron' who lived in Paris; and a young nun, described on her manuscript as a 'fille, religieuse', from one of the convents in Châlons who wrote on the reform of French penal laws. One can only speculate that there were other women who wrote, but whose essays are among those whose authors are as yet unidentified.

¹¹ AD Marne I J 41 No. 78. As we shall see, Roussel de la Berardièrre was not alone among the essayists in realizing the magnitude of the problem and the threat to civil order posed by a majority poor populace.

¹² Roche makes a similar point in generalizing about the function of all provincial academic contests. For the public, he remarks, an academic contest 'multiplie les occasions de mobiliser l'opinion et révèle aux hommes sans lettres une image de leur existence'. Le Siècle des lumières, I, 355. And for the academy: 'c'est en plaidant constamment l'utilité de leurs travaux que les élites académiques réussissent à trouver une cohérence idéologique collective suffisamment vague pour faciliter l'accord de tous les groupes sociaux et suffisamment puissant pour leur inspirer une confiance inébranlable dans l'avenir et dans les résultats du mouvement'.

CULTURAL CONTACT AND CULTURAL ISOLATION

The majority (84%) of those who responded to the Academy's announcements of its public contests was outside the Old Regime's official cultural bodies.¹³ In fact, when we begin to study the personal histories of those who wrote for the Academy's contests, we discover cultural (and social and geographic) backgrounds as richly varied as the society from which the essayists were drawn.¹⁴

'Milieux académiques', pp. 174-75.

¹³ This figure substantiates Roche's contention that the public attracted to academic competitions generally represented 'l'inversion de la hiérarchie académique'. *Le Siècle des lumières*, I, 336.

¹⁴ To forestall confusion in the discussion of the essayists that will follow here and in Part Three, some figures must be made clear. The total number of essayists identified by name and profession is 233. An additional 33 have been identified by name and geographic origin only. For 30 other essays it has been possible to determine the geographic origin of the essay but not its author's name. Finally, I have established that the Academy received another 87 essays whose writers I have not yet been able to identify and/or whose essays have been lost without trace. The one-time existence of the essays in this second group has been assumed, based upon the academy's listing of their 'devise' or on the number assigned the essays by the academy in the process of judging a whole 'set' of essays for its competition. Unfortunately, there is not an extant memoir for every essayist whose correspondence with the academy identifies him as a contest competitor. So, for example, in Part III, I will discuss the 152 extant essays submitted for the Academy's contests on the begging and labouring poor. I have been able to identify the authors of 105 of the 152 essays by name and by profession. I have the names of 14 other authors but am unable to match author and essay.

The Châlons départemental archives house 296 complete and partial essays, plus 'rapports' or general summaries by the Academy of 15 of the essays missing from the dossiers. Twenty other essays have been located in the Bibliothèque Nationale, the départemental archives of Arras, and the municipal libraries of Besançon, Châlons and Reims. We thus have available to us 331 essays in complete, partial or summary form. Part Two initially discusses the cultural and professional background of the 266 identified essays for all the Châlons contests before concluding with a discussion of the smaller group (105 identified essayists) competing in the Academy's contests on the begging and labouring poor. [The three essays most recently identified in printed form in the British Library do not enter into these figures.] The content analysis in Part III will be limited to the essays written for these two contest questions.

First in cultural although not in numerical importance were the 43 or 16% of the identified essay competitors for all the Academy's contests who either legitimately claimed to be members of a provincial academy (as titular, honorary or corresponding members or as 'agrégé pour les arts')¹⁵ -- or who indicated in their correspondence with the Châlons Academy that, although not yet officially members of an academic society, they were in correspondence with other academies. Daniel Roche has estimated that there were only 6,000 Frenchmen (or 1.2% of Frenchmen with secondary education) who at any time in the eighteenth century were recognized as titular, honorary or corresponding members of an academy. Seen in the light of Roche's figures, the 43 of the Châlons essayists (or 16%) claiming association with an academy would seem to be high; however, the Châlons figure may be explained in part, by the fact that at least a third of the forty-three 'academician' competitors could not yet legitimately claim affiliation with an academy when they wrote their Châlons essay.¹⁶ Even if we grant that 16% of the Châlons essayists did, as they claimed, eventually become attached to an academy in some recognized capacity and add to this information the fact that at least 12 of these, or 4.5%, are known to have submitted essays for the public contests of other academies, we still may not assume homogeneity in the cultural role or background of the essayists even within this category.

Among the Châlons Academy's academic essay competitors we find some of the eighteenth-century's most reputable -- and some of its most

¹⁵ The 'agrégé pour les arts', clockmakers, engravers, architects and even engineers, were the academic 'stepchildren' of the Encyclopédie, recognized for their technical expertise but somehow not fully integrated into the academic confraternity.

¹⁶ The 1.2% figure is based on Roche's estimate of 500,000 Frenchmen with some form of secondary education. Roche, Le Siècle des lumières, I, 190.

disreputable -- academicians. In the first category fall those who wrote for the Châlons contests as members of national and even international academic bodies. Two of the most prominent academician contestants were Guyton de Morveau and Elie de Beaumont, who were both members of the Royal Society of London in addition to enjoying prominent positions in French academies. Guyton de Morveau was chancelier of the Academy of Dijon, and among its most active and tireless members, and Élie de Beaumont, whom Voltaire once called 'un vrai philosophe' (for his defense of the Calas) and who had an honorary doctorate from Oxford, not only competed for but actually himself funded academic prizes.¹⁷ Essay contestants François Sabbathier and Goyon d'Arzac, while less prominent, shared or would share with Élie de Beaumont the honour of membership in the Academy of Berlin. As we have seen, Sabbathier became permanent secretary of the Châlons Academy but, when he wrote his essay for the Châlons contest on begging, he was already a member of the Berlin Academy and the Société étrusque de Cortone. Goyon d'Arzac, who was the Châlons Academy's most indefatigable competitor (he entered seven of its contests), was eventually granted a pension by the Academy of Berlin after he settled there as an émigré. He was also a member of the academies of Besançon and Montauban -- and

¹⁷ In addition to the three prizes he would eventually fund for the Châlons Academy, Élie de Beaumont gave 500 livres to the Bordeaux Academy to pose a question on 'la manière de tirer parti des landes de Bordeaux'. Barrière, L'Académie de Bordeaux, p. 118 and Michaud, XII, 357. Information on Guyton de Morveau can be found in Michaud, XIII, 292-98 and Quérard, La France littéraire ou dictionnaire biographique des savants, historiens et gens de lettres de France (Paris, F. Didot, 1827-64), II, 561 [henceforth Quérard]. For an account of Guyton's work in the Academy of Dijon (he was chancellor from 1782, the year after he submitted his essay to the Châlons Academy) see Tisserand, L'Académie de Dijon, who discusses this bourgeois avocat général and chemist throughout his history but most especially pp. 171-75.

eventually of Châlons -- and a founder of the Société des Lettres, Sciences et Arts d'Agen.¹⁸

To the essayist academicians of international stature must be added those who had attained prominence in provincial academies within France: Mathon de la Cour, Mayet and Philipon de la Madeleine in Lyon; Bizet, Bucquet and Sellier at Amiens; Groult at Cherbourg; Roussel de la Berardiére at Caen; Le Trosne at Orleans; Romans de Coppier at Rouen and Lecreulx and Piroux at Nancy. Among these competitors were numbered, too, prominent figures in the French Société d'agriculture: Morand in the agricultural society of Chambery and, most prominently, Boncerf in the society in Paris.¹⁹

¹⁸ On Sabbathier see: Quérard, VIII, 298. On Goyon d'Arzac see: J. Andrieu, Bibliographie générale de l'Agenais (Agen, Michel et Nedon, 1886), pp. 334-36.

¹⁹ On Mathon de la Cour see: Quérard, V, 621; on Mayet see: Quérard, I, 657-58; on Philipon de la Madeleine: Louis Trenard, Histoire sociale des idées: Lyon, de l'Encyclopédie au Préromanticisme (Paris, PUF, 1958), pp. 448-49. On Bizet, who was a friend of Lavoisier, see: Biographie des hommes célèbres, des savants, des artistes et des littérateurs du département de la Somme (Amiens, Machaet, 1835) and Berthe, La Dictionnaire des correspondants de l'Académie d'Arras (Arras, chez l'auteur, 1969), p. 46. I am grateful to Professor Philippe Sueur for having identified the Bizet essay. On Bucquet, who also helped found the Société d'agriculture of Beauvais, see: Victor Leblond, Inventaire sommaire de la collection Bucquet-aux-Cousteaux (Beauvais, Imprimerie département de l'Oise, 1906). Sellier was eventually a member of the Academies of Amiens, Arras, Hesse-Hambourg and the Marine Academy of Brest; he also was an associate member of the Agricultural Societies of Laon, Soissons, Rouen and Beauvais and of the Philanthropical Society of Strasbourg and a corresponding member of the Société du Musée of Paris. See Harvey Chisick, 'Attitudes toward the Education of the 'Peuple' in the French Enlightenment: 1762-1789' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1974); 'Institutional Innovation in Popular Education in Eighteenth Century France', French Historical Studies, 10 no. 1 (Spring 1977), 40-73; and The Limits of Reform in the Enlightenment: Attitudes toward the Education of the Lower Classes in Eighteenth-Century France (Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 20, 25, 28-29, 35, 172, 175, 234 and 243. Groult was also a member of the Academies of Caen and Rouen and a corresponding member of the Académie royale de la Marine. He was instrumental in the re-creation of the Cherbourg Academy after the revolution, by which time he was already 80 years old. Allix, 'Un fondateur de la Société académique: Thomas Groult, procureur du roi au siège de l'Amirauté de Cherbourg', Mémoires de la Société de Cherbourg, 35

However, all the essayists included in the 16% and thus with some tie to an academic or agricultural society were not as eminent as the aforementioned academicians. The 43 essayists comprehended under this category included not only titular and associate members (whose participation was presumably active) but also corresponding members and those who indicated that they were simply on occasion in correspondence with an academic body. It is not unreasonable to include these essayists in the category 'academician' in so far as they did express aspirations or pretensions to academic eminence; but placing them in this category may be misleading -- if not wholly erroneous -- since association with a royal academy would seem to suggest some measure of cultural sophistication and of socio-cultural acceptance and acceptability which, judging from the essays some of them submitted for the Châlons contests, were qualities well beyond their grasp.

The statistical significance of the figure of 43 or 16% of identified competitors with ties to an academy should therefore be assessed in the light of the fact that some of these self-styled 'academicians' had only a tenuous claim to academic activity, which was nonetheless sufficient for

(1956), 61-75. On Le Trosne see: Mille, Un physiocrate oublié: G.-F. LeTrosne (1728-1780) (Paris, L. Larose et L. Tenin, 1905) and Weuleresse, Le Mouvement physiocratique en France de 1756 à 1770, 4th edition, Maison des Sciences de l'homme (Paris, Mouton, 1968), I, 99, 119 and 131 and Larousse, X, 417. On Romans de Coppiet see AD de la Seine-Maritime RH6, Procès verbaux de l'Académie de Rouen, 1780. On LeCreulx, who was a titular member of the Académie des sciences et belles lettres at Nancy, see: Quérard, V, 64-65. I am grateful to M. Pierre Gérard, Directeur des services d'archives de Meurthe et Moselle for supplying detailed information about LeCreulx. On Piroux, who was founder of the Institut des Sourds et Muets de Nancy and a member of the Académie royale de Stanislas and winner of two of its prizes and one of the Academy of Lyon -- all subsequent to his Châlons essay, see Quérard, VII, 190. On Morand, baron de Saint Sulpice and founder of the agricultural society at Chambéry: A. de Foras, Armorial et nobiliaire de l'Ancien duché de Savoie (Grenoble, Imprimerie d'Allier, 1900), IV, 181-86. On Boncerf, see Camille Bloch et Alexandre Tuetey, eds, Procès-verbaux et rapports du Comité de Mendicité de la Constituante, 1790-1791 (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1911), xvi.

some of them to feel justified in appending the title to their names when they signed the 'devise' which identified them as author of their Châlons essay. So, as is sometimes the case with statistical information, it is the gap between presumption and proof which may here be most significant: for the most ambitious and the least successful of these 'academic' essayists, the gulf between their aspirations to academic eminence and actual membership in an academy was a distance bridged only by a paper lie.

Some qualifications -- like the 'formalités' of a proper academic style -- could not, however, be lied about or hidden. As we have seen, stylistic infelicities like empty ideas were noted by the judging Châlons academicians as they sought to determine an essay's potential contribution. Thus, despite the fact that in principle the essays were judged by the Academy without knowledge of the essayist's cultural credentials and that academic membership was definitely not a prerequisite for competing in the Châlons contests, the cultural skills that academic status was intended to convey were not unimportant in the writing of a well-argued and thus outstanding prize essay. The winner of the Academy's first contest and author of the longest (420 pages) and most erudite essay in that competition was written by the 'associé adjoint' soon to be titular member of the Rouen Academy, Romans de Coppier.²⁰

²⁰ AD Marne I J 42, No. 113. For further information on Romans de Coppier see AD de la Seine-Maritime RH 6 - Procès verbaux de l'Académie de Rouen, volume for 1761-1780. The entry for 1777 indicates that he presented a 'Projet d'enrichir les pauvres' to the Rouen Academy in that year. The published procès-verbaux for 1779 include his 'Ne pourrait-on pas multiplier en faveur des personnes du sexe les moyens de subsistances', RH6, 1771-1780, pp. 160-62. I am grateful to M Georges Guerif of the departmental archives for alerting me to the existence of these documents.

Like Romans de Coppier, a substantial proportion of those whose essays would win the Academy's prize had established or would establish formal links with a recognized body of savants; among these were Le Creulx, Boncerf, Clicquot de Blervache, Brissot, Henriquez, Philippon de la Madeleine, Goyon d'Arzac and Mathon de Lacour.

It is also nevertheless important to recognize that not all those writing for the Châlons contests and claiming academic ties were as erudite as the Oratorian Romans de Coppier. As those outside the academies were quick to insist, academic membership was not always a clear or just reflection of qualitative cultural factors. Sometimes election to an academy seems to have had as much to do with how much a man had in his pockets as with what he had in his head. The Châlons contestant Bourdier de Beauregard provides an almost perfect illustration of the academic attainment possible to the culturally marginal maecenas. Bourdier de Beauregard had been directeur général des domaines du roi for the generality of Pau since 1757. His wealth, which he modestly qualified as 'considérable', apparently continued to increase exponentially with his tenure in the fiscal administration.²¹ In fact, in the somewhat barbed assessment of a fellow Pau academician, J.G. de Loussat, it was Bourdier's wealth -- and not the quality of his mind -- which gained him access to the Pau Parlement and which persuaded people to 'supporte[r] qu'il y soit extraordinairement bavard et diseur de riens'. 'Ne sachant ni latin ni loix', Bourdier dared to 'aspirer à devenir avocat' and, according to his critic, was 'reçu à l'Université de Pau où l'appas du casuel rend comme on le sçait les professeurs infiniment commodes'. In 1762 Bourdier matriculated as a lawyer before the Navarre Parlement, and, once there, there was 'presque aucun genre de glorieuse ambition' which this cultural cipher 'n'a cru lui être propre'. The sterling qualities that facilitated

²¹ He owned a vast domain at Igon (which sold for 67,000 francs in 1802) and seigniories at Bruges, Montant and Lestelle. He owned a house in the centre of Pau (complete with stable and poultry yard) for which he paid 12,000 livres in 1768 and additional rural real estate at Bizanos, a farm at Porte Neuve on the outskirts of Pau (which was sharecropped at 430 francs annually) and another at Mineville, which was part of his wife's dowry. In a will of 1802 Bourdier claimed to have lost 'plus de trois cent mille livres écus [...] par les effets de la révolution'. AD Pyrénées Atlantiques III E 5830 No. 471 and III E 1761, 4 November 1802.

his entrance into the Pau Parlement gained him membership of the Academy, even though he was by all accounts 'à mille lieues loin d'avoir quelque teinture de belles lettres'. Again according to Loussat, Bourdier's initial discourse in that academy gained him an unchallenged place in the academy's memory: 'on se souviendra long temps de son plat et absurde discours de réception'. But Bourdier did not stop there. 'Le secrétariat ne lui parut pas au dessus de ses forces. On le lui livre [...]. En un mot, pas d'occasion d'un peu de gloriole et d'éclat où cet homme n'a recherché quelque distinction en encore plus décelé sa nullité'. Bourdier's rise through the academy had been virtually meteoric despite all his limitations; and for Loussat the explanation was simple: 'il est très riche; je n'en connais aucun que cela ne couvre'.²²

Bourdier was neither the first nor the last 'diseur de riens' who would seek distinction in the Republic of Letters in the eighteenth century. But only a handful of others seem to have competed -- often with the best of intentions -- in the Châlons contests. Probably the most picturesque example of this genre is Louis Monfrabeuf, 'ancien garde du corps' and seigneur of the Petites Armoises, a hamlet of 45 feux in the Ardennes, far from the intellectual life of even a provincial academy. Monfrabeuf's isolation is typical of that of many of the Châlons essayists; but, his ambition -- and his intellectual pretensions -- place him with the tiny minority of essayists clearly attempting to use the Academy's contests to enter the world of intellectual respectability. Seigneur of only 60 arpents of arable land and 207 of marsh, Monfrabeuf nevertheless managed to form a library and initiate correspondence with various hommes de

²² I am grateful to Mme Dominique Pinzuti, Conservateur-adjoint, Archives des Pyrénées-Atlantiques, for having sent me a copy of the Loussat manuscript and of the documents pertaining to Bourdier's reception at the Navarre bar (AD Pyrénées-Atlantiques B 4559, fol. 115) and his property holdings.

lettres, including d'Alembert.²³ Monfrabeuf was 'tourmenté du désir d'acquérir de la célébrité'. The scope of his interests was, according to one source, phenomenal: 'morale, religion, philosophie, éducation, économie publique et rurale, il embrassa tout, il disserta sur tout, employant jour et nuit un copiste à écrire sous sa dictée tout ce qui lui passait par la tête'.²⁴ Unfortunately, Monfrabeuf's abilities were not equal to his imagination, his zeal or his ambition. He was never legitimately affiliated to an academy and, as an Ardennais chronicler later wrote of his works: 'Le seul avantage qui puissent tirer ceux qui auront le courage de les lire, c'est de connaître jusqu'à quel point de dégradation peut aller l'art d'écrire'.²⁵

J.-P. Brissot was only aspiring to membership in an academy when he submitted the first of his three essays for competition in a Châlons contest. Although he clearly shared the academic ambitions of Bourdier and Monfrabeuf and like them hoped to use the academy's prize to win 'un titre sûr à la gloire',²⁶ he did so relying on neither great wealth nor minor nobility but rather on 'la vertu & les talens' which were said to have 'seuls droit a[ux] vrais hommages' in the academies.²⁷ Though not considered a philosophe, Brissot was not above trading in philosophes'

²³ AD des Ardennes E 523, Extrait du procès verbal du papier terrier de la terre et seigneurie des Petites Armoises, dressé à la requête de Louis de Monfrabeuf, 19 juin 1779.

²⁴ Michaud, Biographie universelle, XXVIII. The public result of Monfrabeuf's feverish activity was twelve publications, one of which was 'Le Représentant du genre humain' (no date) in which the author assumed the singular title for a minor French noble of 'roi des juifs' and 'porte parole du Christ'.

²⁵ Bouillot, Biographie ardennaise, quoted in Quérard, VI, 200.

²⁶ AD Marne I J 209, from a letter Brissot wrote to the Châlons Academy and dated 4 September 1780.

²⁷ D'Alembert, Histoire des membres de l'Académie Française, xxxii.

names to cultivate his own career, which included the pursuit not only of the Châlons Academy's prizes but also of acceptance into the body as a member.²⁸ His essays for the Academy's competitions on the penal code and on the rights of the falsely accused citizen (written to save the 'dix mille [...] innocents dont le sort est enseveli dans l'obscurité') as well as an essay on popular education give eloquent witness to both his political ideals and his academic ambition.²⁹ And in December of

²⁸ Though Brissot would later compose a disclaimer (Mémoires, 1754-1784, ed. by Claude Perroud (Paris, Picard & Fils, 1912), p. 234), in the early eighties he actively sought the Châlons Academy's approbation. In a letter dated 29 October 1781 Brissot wrote saying that his gratitude to the Academy for its prizes and membership was such that 'je ne pourrais les acquitter qu'en dévouant tous mes travaux à sa gloire'. AD Marne I J 209.

In the pre-revolutionary period Brissot wrote to or was in correspondence or association with Voltaire, Linguet, Marat, Servan, Lafayette, La Rochefoucauld, Lavoisier, Petion de Villeneuve and Sièyes. It is amusing to note that the trade in names was not confined to those attempting to enter the Parisian 'philosophic' market. Brissot's name was itself dropped by a 'friend', the thoroughly ambitious and unscrupulous provincial Bruzard de Mauvelain who in 1783 himself sought membership in the Châlons Academy: 'J'ai parmi vous, Monsieur, un ami intime, un savant estimable, Mr Brissot de Varville'. AD Marne I J 209 - letter from Mauvelain in 1783 to the Academy's permanent secretary. For more information and references on Mauvelain and Brissot and the Châlons Academy see Robert Darnton, 'Trade in the Taboo: The Life of a Clandestine Book Dealer in Prerevolutionary France' in The Widening Circle: Essays on the Circulation of Literature in 18th Century Europe (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc, 1976), pp. 13-14 and 17-18.

²⁹ Brissot, Mémoires, I, 16. Brissot could not afford to ignore the 600 livres prize money offered for the 1780 contest on criminal procedure. This sum would have eased his own straitened financial situation in the 1780s when, having failed to establish a London-based world centre for philosophers which was to have spread its message through a journal called Correspondance universelle sur tout ce qui intéresse le bonheur de l'homme et de la société, he was first thrown into prison for debt, then into the Bastille on suspicion of having produced anti-government pamphlets. Opponents in the Revolution later accused him of having worked in this period (for a salary of 150 livres a month) as a spy for the lieutenant de police of Paris Lenoir. See Darnton, 'The Grub Street Style of Revolutionary: J.-P. Brissot, Police Spy', The Journal of Modern History, 55 (1968), 302 and 313. For a more sympathetic reading of Brissot's early career see chapter 5, 'Brissot', of Norman Hampson's Will & Circumstance: Montesquieu, Rousseau and the French Revolution (London, Duckworth, 1983), pp. 84-106.

1780 his labours were rewarded when he was invited to become an 'associé libre' of the Châlons society.

Only four of all those competing like Brissot in a competition of this academy could justifiably describe themselves as 'hommes de lettres' -- but even these four did not live solely by their pens. Choderlos de Laclos, who competed in the Châlons competition on the education of women, combined literary pursuits (which included publication of Les Liaisons dangereuses the year before the Châlons competition) with an active military career.³⁰ Of the other three, Jean-Baptiste Bizet, who spent his whole life in Amiens and eventually became a resident member of its academy, seems to have enjoyed a private income which enabled him to devote himself to the composition of useful works like his 'Mémoire sur la tourbe' and an essay on 'Des avantages et des inconvenients de la libre exportation

³⁰ The manuscript of Laclos's essay is missing from the Châlons archives but may be read in Édouard Champion's edition of it, after a BN manuscript, De l'éducation des femmes (Paris, Librairie Léon Vanier, 1903). For a discussion of this essay see Barbara Guetti's 'The Old Regime and the Feminist Revolution: 'Laclos' 'De l'éducation des femmes', Yale French Studies, 63 (1982), 139-162.

Choderlos de Laclos's activities as a writer and publicist paralleled his long military career. In addition to Les Liaisons dangereuses, he published a number of poems in L'Almanach des muses and wrote the libretto for a comic opera whose one performance (in 1777) was attended by Marie-Antoinette. In 1779 Laclos was sent to La Rochelle to undertake work on military fortifications; he became a member of the provincial academy there and the next year competed for the eloquence prize of the Académie Française with an essay Sur l'éloge de Vauban, which he published that year. His literary talents were put to more explicitly political use when he entered the service of the duc d'Orléans in 1788. In 1789 he co-authored with Sièyes the influential pamphlet, 'Instructions données par S.A.S. Mgr. le duc d'Orléans à ses représentants aux bailliages suivie de délibérations à prendre dans les Assemblées' and with Brissot the Champs de Mars petition of July 1791. He had in 1790 joined the Jacobin Club and until his disaffection in July of 1791 edited its Journal de la Société des Amis de la Constitution. See Quérard, II, 191 and Beatrice Hyslop, A Guide to the General Cahiers of 1789 with the Texts of Unedited Cahiers (New York, Octagon Books, 1968), pp. 57-58. It is interesting to note that in his military capacity Laclos's attention was once again drawn to Châlons: in 1792 the minister of war Servan sent him to organize the military base at Châlons, which was considered one of the most important points of outer defence of Paris.

des blés', interests which he put to use in the essay he wrote for the Châlons Academy on how to improve the prospects of the peasant farmer and laborer. The abbé Le Chevalier, who submitted (late) a memoir on the begging poor, lived and worked in Paris where he functioned as 'censeur royal de belles lettres et histoire' and served the Châlons Academy faithfully in later years as one of its most active associate members. The fourth competitor in this category, André Jacques Leclerc, was as yet only an 'homme de lettres' in the making. He was fifteen years old when he wrote his essay for the Châlons Academy's first competition and it was only in the Revolution that he became a journalist, founding the Chronique nationale et étrangère et en particulier des 5 départements substitués à la province de Normandie, which survived only as long as its young editor, executed before he had reached his thirtieth year for having organized a pro-monarchist demonstration in Rouen in 1793.³¹

However, with these exceptions, most of those who wrote for the Châlons contests were not -- and had few illusions about becoming -- recognized citizens of the Republic of Letters. Although 58 or 22% of the identified essayists are known to have composed other works in their lifetimes,³² they did not describe themselves as 'hommes de lettres' and,

³¹ Bizet's essay on the grain trade, written in the 1750s for the prize essay competition of the Academy of Lyons, advanced convincing arguments in favour of that trade and not only won the Lyon prize but received official praise from the government. For background on Le Chevalier, who was both essay competitor (1777) and an associate member of the Academy, see Quérard, V, 43. On Leclerc see Oursel, Nouvelle biographie normande (Paris, A. Picard, 1886) and Prudhomme, Dictionnaire des individus envoyés à la mort. I am once again indebted to the archivist M. Georges Guerif, of the departmental archives of the Seine-Maritime for his assistance with information about Leclerc.

³² All those who claim at least some tie to an academic or literary society are among the essayists in this group.

most probably considered themselves no more than local literati.³³ Judging from the titles of their compositions, 22 of the author essayists produced a great variety and number of essays on topics indicating wide-ranging interests if not competence.

But within and among these amateur men of letters, many of whom seemed to share the century's obsession with the encyclopedic, were the Châlons contestants whose known public writings were impressive and, in some cases, highly specialized works reflecting their authors' acknowledged professional expertise. These essayists were: Daniel Jousse, one of the eighteenth century's most renowned legal commentators, who with his son composed a memoir for the Châlons society on judicial reform; Charles-Joseph Panckoucke, who within months of writing his Châlons essay on begging acquired the privilege to publish the Mercure de France and in 1782 began publication of the Encyclopédie méthodique; and the senior government official Clicquot de Blervache who served for more than a quarter century as Inspecteur générale des manufactures et du commerce. All three submitted essays for the Châlons competitions and all were acknowledged leaders in their respective fields.³⁴ This group is completed by those

³³ It is likely that my list of author essayists is incomplete. To compile it I have relied on catalogues, dictionaries or bibliographies of eighteenth-century manuscript and printed works and upon the assistance of local archivists and librarians who were willing to provide information about manuscripts held in their institutions and/or listed in the inventories for the estates of the Academy's known competitors, where such inventories exist.

³⁴ On Jousse, who was a conseiller au présidial of Orléans, author of a score of books on jurisprudence, the most famous of which was his commentary on criminal law, see: Charles Cuissard, Biographie du Loiret (Orleans, 1854) and Michaud, XXI, 259. Jousse was a prudent man of great legal erudition; he was nonetheless a determined advocate of legal reform whose publications were not always welcomed by those in authority. For example, in the mid 1750s Joly de Fleury halted publication of one of Jousse's most serious works, a treatise on the jurisdiction of the presidial courts. His published works most closely related to the competition question on the administration of justice which he wrote for the Châlons Academy were his Traité de la justice criminelle de France, où

l'on examine tout ce qui concerne les crimes et les peines en général et en particulier, les juges établis pour décider les affaires criminelles, 4 vols (Orléans, 1771) and Traité de l'administration de la justice où l'on examine tout ce qui regarde la juridiction en général, la compétence, les fonctions, devoirs des officiers de judicature, 4 vols (Orléans, 1771). I am grateful to M H. Charnier of the departemental archives of the Loiret for much of this information as well as details of the manuscript 'Traité des lois criminelles' by Jousse held in Orléans - AD du Loiret, MS 352.

Panckoucke, who was born to a family of publisher printers from Lille, had a passionate amateur interest in mathematics and sciences and inserted several of his own articles in composite works he published for others. These articles included a 'mémoire sur le cerveau' and 'métamorphoses des insectes'. But he is, of course, known less as an author than as a publisher whose list included not only the Encyclopédie methodique but also the journals the Mercure de France and the Années, Affiches et Avis divers pour les Pays Bas français (into which he inserted extracts of Rousseau's Émile which Panckoucke had just published). He also published the Mémoires of both the Académie des Sciences and the Académie des Inscriptions et belles lettres and, through his various publishing enterprises, enjoyed (and suffered) contact with ministers Sartine, Vergennes and Montmorin. Described by Brissot as 'un marchand d'idées', Panckoucke was, ironically, less a man of letters himself than a man who, as Robert Darnton has indicated, made a business of the enlightenment and facilitated and helped to finance many of the most well-known men of letters of his generation by his publication of their writings. Regular contributors to the Mercure included Mallet du Pan, La Harpe, Imbert, Suard (his brother-in-law) and, occasionally, Marmontelle, Lalande, Chamfort, Lacratelle and Condorcet. Panckoucke was also responsible for the clandestine diffusion of a Genevan edition of Voltaire's Oeuvres and of Raynal's Histoire des Indes. His publication of the Mercure is of especial interest here because its content was divided between more properly literary news (like announcements of inventions and discoveries in the arts and sciences, of governments edicts and arrêts, of 'causes célèbres' and notes -- including the announcement of prize essay competitions -- from the Parisian and provincial academies, as well as information about finance, legislation, education and agriculture) and political news (in the section under the heading Journal de Bruxelles, the publisher prided himself on inserting 'les nouvelles les plus piquantes et les plus fraîches'). It would be interesting to speculate how many of Panckoucke's fellow Châlons competitors who lived in the provinces relied on his publications as their main source of information about the Republic of Letters in Paris and beyond.

The most thorough examination of Panckoucke's life and work has been undertaken by Suzanne Tucoc-Chala. See her 'La Diffusion des lumières dans la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle: Charles Joseph Panckoucke, un libraire éclairé (1760-1790), Dix-Huitième siècle, 6 (1974), 115-28, and Charles-Joseph Panckoucke et la librairie française (1736-1779); and her entries on Panckoucke in Sgard, ed., Dictionnaire des Journaux, II, 705-06 and 856-58. Referring to the some seventeen journals he owned before the Revolution, Elizabeth Eisenstein describes Panckoucke as a 'press baron before the fact'. See her Grub Street Abroad, p. 132. See, too, David I. Kulstein, 'The Ideas of Charles-Joseph Panckoucke, publisher of the Moniteur universel, on the French Revolution', French Historical Studies (Spring 1966), pp. 304-19 and Bulletin de la Société d'études de la province de Cambrai, XLII, 1^{er} fascicule, 1949, 17-23.

essayists who, less well-known within their profession, nevertheless did publish one or two memoirs on subjects springing directly from the concerns of their daily occupations. In this group are the engineers Le Creulx and Lejeune who wrote on roads and canals; the doctors Lebrun, Noel and Grosjean who wrote on medical topics; Delisle Demoncel, 'premier louvetier' of the Prince de Condé, who wrote on the destruction of wolves; and the laboureur Morize whose only other known work besides his Châlons essay was a 'Mémoire sur le moyen de faire du cidre'.³⁵

Clicquot de Blervache, who came from a family with important commercial interests in Reims, worked in the family business there and in Nancy before being named in 1760 procureur syndic for the town of Reims, charged with representing the interests of the municipality before the Crown and acting as conduit of information and instruction from central government to Reims. Already in the 1750s he had won three prizes from the Academy of Amiens for essays on commerce, manufacturing and the guilds and for a dissertation on the effect of interest rates on agriculture and manufacturing. Impressed by these essays and the Remois's effectiveness in government service, the minister Trudaine, on the recommendation of Rouillé d'Orfeuil, in 1765 appointed Clicquot de Blervache as Inspecteur Général de Commerce et de Manufacture, one of five to hold this post for all of France. The prize-winning essays he wrote for the Châlons Academy (on fiscal and administrative reform, on the plight of the rural poor, and on improving the quality of wood produced in Champagne) were but one more manifestation of this senior civil servant's personal and professional commitment to promote agriculture, manufacturing and trade and to reduce the fiscal burdens being born by these sectors of the economy. See Jules Devroil, Notice sur Clicquot-Blervache: Économiste du XVIII^e siècle (Paris, Librairie de Guillaumin et Cie, 1870) and Weulersse, Le Mouvement physiocratique, I, 28, 59, 195, 251, 260, 263, 269, 393, 398.

³⁵ On Le Creulx who was ingenieur en chef des ponts et chaussées for Lorraine and who won the Châlons Academy's prize for his memoir on the corvée see Roche, Le Siècle des lumières, I, 246. On Lebrun: P.J. Grosley, Mémoires des Troyens célèbres, II, 57-73 and Émile Socard, Biographie des personnages du Troyes et du département de l'Aube (Troyes, L. Lacrois, 1820), p. 252. On Noel: Charles Rémy, 'Les Médecins et les chirurgiens rémois', Almanach-annuaire historique ... de la Marne, 1859 and Quérard, VI, 430. It is amazing that Noel found the time to write his Châlons essay at all; he left for America to serve as chirurgien-majeur in December 1776 -- the winter he wrote his Châlons essay -- where, after a mission to France with Franklin, he became director of French hospitals in Philadelphia during the American Revolutionary War. On Grosjean: Richard, Annuaire des Vosges, 1841. Delisle Demoncel was in correspondence with the Nancy Academy. His works are listed in the Catalogue général des livres imprimés de la Bibliothèque Nationale, (1909), XXXVII, 994 and Quérard, II, 455-56. Morize won a prize from the Academy of Rouen for his cider essay in 1781 and an honourable mention from the Châlons Academy in 1786 for his

The remainder of the Châlons contestants who are known to have produced some other written text -- almost a third of the 62 -- never saw their works reach printed form. The titles of their writings conjure up images of the Sunday-afternoon amateur scientist -- men like the Norman hobereau Godefroy de Boisjugon, whose only other known work besides his Châlons memoir was an essay on bee-keeping; or, the more energetic Louis de Payan de Moulin, who was accepted neither into an academy nor into print but who nevertheless spent what leisure was left to him -- after performing his duties as doctor in a tiny town in the Ardèche -- encouraging and improving viticulture in the region, writing essays on the cultivation of dwarf mulberry and silkworms, and inventing a 'bateau sous-marin'.³⁶

What makes the material generated by the contests of the Châlons Academy remarkable is not, however, the catalogue and calibre of those who had written or won the prizes of other academies or who had or would publish

essay on how to prevent the scarcity of wood. That same year he also won a prize from the Academy of Amiens. Morize was an associate member of the agricultural society in his hometown of Evreux and of the agricultural society at Auch as well. See Léon-Noël Berthe, Dictionnaire des correspondants de l'Académie d'Arras au temps de Robespierre (Arras, chez l'auteur, 1969), pp. 160-61.

³⁶ De Payan, who added 'du Moulin' to his name because of the seigniorial mill his family owned, wrote numerous unpublished essays on political economy, military organization, taxes, etc. The essay he wrote on penal reform for the Châlons Academy received an honourable mention. Information concerning the unpublished manuscripts of de Payan was supplied through the research of M F. Vernet of the Ardèche départemental archives. The information on Godefroy de Boisjugon is taken from Théodore Lebreton, Biographie normande, I. Jacques LeBrigant is another example of the essayists who fall into the group of minor authors and professional men. However, even though he signed his Châlons essay 'avocat à Tréguier en Bretagne', Le Brigant did not practise law but lived from his rentes and, in the leisure left him after fathering twenty-two children, was devoted to the study of Celtic languages. Unlike most of the other amateur-scientist essayists, Le Brigant published eight works on his avocation during his lifetime, in addition to fashionably encyclopedic works like his 'Notions générales encyclopédiques'. Pierre Levot, Biographie bretonne (Vannes, Cauderan, 1857), II, 203-07.

their views elsewhere. What gives the manuscripts submitted for the contests of this academy their singular significance for historians of pre-revolutionary literate opinion is that more than three quarters of those who had been identified as having written for this academy appear to have left no other known evidence indicating that they produced any other literary text except the essays they wrote for the Châlons contests nor, apart from their Châlons essays, have they left any other known record of correspondence or manuscripts destined for another learned body, agricultural or academic society. Their Châlons essays thus grant us unique access to the views of a new cross-section of literate opinion about openly reformist questions. Whatever acquaintance these unpracticed authors had with the more broadly based Republic of Letters seems to have been a passing one, presumably gained through what they read in the books available to them or in digest form in journals, almanacs or other periodicals.³⁷ In most cases, however, they make no reference in their

³⁷ Elizabeth Eisenstein's Grub Street Abroad provides instructive insight into the influence of the French language periodic press on those without immediate access to learned societies or books. Of particular interest for the present study is her second chapter, 'News from the Republic of Letters', pp. 36-65. She offers helpful comment on the contrast between the 'extensive' reading practices of those with easy access to recently published books and the 'intensive' reading of those less privileged. On the role of reviews and journals she writes: 'They certainly made it easier to get a glancing acquaintance with many books by way of abridgements, abstracts and summaries. Encounters with diverse journals in reading rooms [...] meant encountering divergent views of the same books and this may have helped to sharpen the critical faculties of some cognoscenti. At the same time the journals also served readers with limited access to books as little portable libraries that were read and reread -- read "intensively" that is, to the point where their contents were completely absorbed.' On the hourly, daily or weekly basis by which relatively impecunious members of the reading public in France's second city might for a rental fee get limited access to books and periodicals they could not afford to buy see Paul Benhamou, 'The Reading Trade in Lyons: Cellier's cabinet de lecture', Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 308 (1993), 305-21. For a summary account of recent studies devoted to analysis of the categories and contents of book reviews in the periodic press available to French readers from both within and outside French borders see Roger Chartier, The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution, transl. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Durham - London, Duke

essays to contemporary publications beyond telling the Academy where they had read the notice of its contest question. When they wrote their Châlons essays, the vast majority (83% of all the essayists whose ages have been determined) were already beyond the average age for entry into a provincial academy and, having no previous record of publication, few seem to have believed that their Châlons essays would earn them a place among its associate members.³⁸ Nevertheless, two-thirds of the essayists whose birth dates are known were under fifty and still in their professional and social prime of life when they submitted their views to the academy for its judgment.

All but excluded from formal entrance into the Old Regime's cultural corporate bodies, these competitors were none the less actively involved in positions of minor influence in their towns or villages and seem to have regarded the public essay competitions of the Châlons Academy as an unparalleled opportunity to get a wider public hearing for their privately held convictions. As Daniel Roche has noted, 'dans une certaine mesure pour les quarante années qui précèdent la Révolution, la participation au concours académique est la seule forme d'engagement intellectuel accessible à l'ensemble de la classe culturelle'. For those who were educated but excluded from the recognized cultural bodies, the academies' public essay contests clearly attracted a public otherwise 'placé aux confins de la culture savante'.³⁹

University Press, 1991), pp. 157-59.

³⁸ Daniel Roche has determined that the average age for entrance into a Parisian academy was 44, for a provincial academy 34. Le Siècle des lumières, I, 197. I have been able to determine the age of eighty-eight or nearly a third of the Châlons essayists. The average age of those submitting their first essay for judgment by the Châlons Academy was forty-three years. It is slightly higher, forty-six, for the essayists writing for the begging and the labouring poor competitions.

³⁹ Roche, Le Siècle des lumières, I, 316.

The essays written for the Châlons Academy's public essay contests were an appeal by their authors to be heard by those beyond their own limited sphere of influence in villages and towns throughout provincial France. Time and time again we find appended to the essays notes like the following, from the country lawyer Millot of the tiny (46 feux) village of Fulvy. Millot entreated the Academy to be indulgent with his memoir, assuring his judges that he was not so presumptuous as to believe that his essay was good enough to compete for the Academy's prize; however, he added that he hoped his essay would be useful to them 'simplement comme fragment à consulter pour coopérer à la bonne oeuvre dont il est question'. Uttered in isolation in Fulvy, Millot knew that his views would go unheard; however, with the Academy's cooperation, they might reach the King and thus contribute to the movement for reform, which was all the reward that Millot wanted.

Je ne demande d'autre récompense, MM, si vous jugés mes petites idées dignes de votre attention, que vous voulez bien les adopter et les faire valoir car sans votre appui elles ne peuvent pas sortir de leur obscurité.⁴⁰

Millot's unpretentiousness was common among the Châlons essayists. The lowly prêtre vicaire François Boillet from Val de la Haye near Rouen admitted that his close acquaintance with the suffering of his parishioners and his determined desire to remedy it -- if he were ever in a position to do so -- motivated him more than the Academy's prize, which he knew that he could never win.

Ne croyez pas, Messieurs, que je prétende aux prix en me mettant parmi la foule des prétendants. Un vicaire de campagne sans cesse occupé des malheureux n'a pas tant d'ambition. Ma récompense est dans mon coeur: tout mon but est de soumettre à votre examen un plan que, depuis longtemps, j'ai résolu d'établir dans ma paroisse

⁴⁰ AD Marne I J 49 No. 9.

(avec l'agrément de mes propriétaires) si la providence me fait curé.⁴¹

In the view of these provincials, the Academy's contests were filling a public need for self-expression in a society where the public expression of one's views was too often the prerogative of the corporate few. 'N'ayant n'y appuy à la cour comme en province', as one essayist put it, these essayists were convinced that without the Academy's public essay forums their opinions would suffer 'le sort de la perle de la Fable' for, according to another frustrated essayist,

tout ce qui est produit et mis au jour par un homme du commun quoique grand dans le fond est toujours regardé comme un homme qui veut sortir de ses bornes.

The Academy's contests provided the opportunity for which this 'ancien soldat' now 'laboureur d'un âge avancé' had waited so long: 'Puisque l'Académie des sciences, arts et belles lettres de Châlons demande [...] et même offre un prix', he had ventured an essay, trusting that through the Châlons Academy his ideas might one day reach the king whom he had served so long.⁴²

⁴¹ AD Marne I J 40 No. 62. Four years later Boillet did, in fact, become curé of St Cande le Vieux. AD de la Seine-Maritime G 6213. Again, I have M. Georges Guerif to thank for this information.

⁴² AD Marne I J 40 No. 100. The three hundred to six hundred livres prize money for an academy contest represented a considerable sum in Ancien regime society -- enough to feed, house and clothe a poor family for a year. The 1790 Comité de Mendicité set the figure at 435 livres annually. François Furet, 'pour une définition des classes inférieures à l'époque moderne', Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations, 18 (1963), 462. For a good many of those who wrote for the Châlons contests the prize money would have been a substantial boon to their own economies. To cite only one example, consider the financial situation of the Ussel collège professor who wrote an essay for the Academy's first contest on the plight of the beggar. Father Deval, whose memoir unfortunately failed to merit the academy's crown, would undoubtedly have welcomed the 300 livres prize money which represented nearly three times the 105 livres salary he would earn the year he submitted his Châlons essay. René Fage, Le Collège d'Ussel (Paris, Alphonse Picard, 1909), p. 50.

The curé Pauvert from Rochemenier in Anjou had more limited aspirations, realistically settling for getting a hearing before influential persons. Isolated by rank and geography from access to those in power, he, like many of his fellow essayists, could hope to participate in the discussion of political matters directly affecting their lives only if they put their reformist opinions through an academy which could, as he requested of the Châlons academy, 'les faire valoir auprès des personnes en place'. Among those otherwise excluded from public discourse, Pauvert continued, the reform questions being debated in the Châlons contests had obvious solutions -- 'moyens plausibles [...] si aisés à penser! tant de monde les a pensés'.⁴³ But they would go unheard without the intervention of the Academy, multiplying and magnifying the isolated voices, forming through their prize contests and publications a unified public outcry loud enough to reach the ears of those operating in ignorance of the public mood.

Pauvert's hope was reiterated constantly by his fellow essayists. The Academy's projected publication of the winning essays and of the others in résumé gave these Frenchmen hope that

peut-être qu'un jour le gouvernement éclairé par ces réflexions se déterminera à en adopter [...] et les fera exécuter au grand avantage du citoyen et l'état.⁴⁴

The Academy and its contests represented their one medium for publicizing views born of their own experience and for those views, through the Academy, to be broadcast outside their village or parish. The abbé Du Verger, who was his whole life curé of Bezinghem in Artois, began his essay by explaining his hopes and dreams and appealing to the Academy to listen

⁴³ AD Marne I J 49 No. 17.

⁴⁴ AD Marne I J 42, No. 11, letter dated 10 July 1777 written to the academy by Tripier de Lozé, a noble from the Maine and amateur of veterinary medicine.

to the views of those whose lives reflected the experiences of ordinary people:

En m'acquittant aujourd'hui du devoir de citoyen, je me suis dit à moi-même, les grands talents ne sont pas nécessaires dans la plupart des choses utiles. [...] O vous Compagnie illustre! daignes écouter la voix d'un citoyen qui par état connoit le malheur.⁴⁵

By soliciting the views of educated but politically insignificant Frenchmen, without demanding of them an eloquence that was beyond their ken, the Châlons Academy enabled them to be heard and thus to contribute to 'l'utilité publique'.

Si l'amour de ses semblables et le patriotisme exigeoient de l'érudition et de l'éloquence, je garderois un très profond silence et seroit réduit au triste sort pour un citoyen de jalouser en vous l'art de bien écrire et de bien dire. Mais amateurs du bien, vous en cherchez d'autres et vous en trouverez.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ AD Marne I J 39 No. 25. Duverger, who was born in Calais in 1734, remained a priest until the year II when he renounced his duties as minister of the Catholic faith. His father Jean Guingnier dit Duverget had been a grenadier au régiment de Beaujolois but was no longer in the service when his son was born. Duverger's mother could not sign her marriage certificate. AD Pas-de-Calais, 1 G 9, f. 145. Details provided by M P. Bougard, Directeur des Services d'Archives du Pas-de-Calais and based on A. Deramecourt, Le Clergé du diocèse d'Arras, Boulogne et Saint-Omer pendant la Révolution, 1792-1802 (Arras, 1885), III, p. 73, and AD du Pas-de-Calais, MS 183, p. 49.

⁴⁶ AD Marne I J 38 No. 22. The contestant is Jean Louis de Louvoment, curé of Minnecourt near Vitry-les-François who, according to the Abbé Kwanten (here thanked for his invaluable assistance in the Châlons archives), was 'issu de la petite bourgeoisie rurale'. Louvoment received an honourable mention for the essay he submitted for the Academy's competition on the beggar and subsequently competed in its contests on the corvée in 1779 and on commerce in 1783 and was eventually made associé libre of the Academy. See Kwanten, 'La Pentapole', Mémoires de la Société d'Agriculture, Commerce, Sciences et Arts de la Marne, 99 (1974), 270-89. Louvoment refused to sign the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and for a year even refused to give way to the constitutional priest present in Minnecourt and organized resistance to his acceptance. He was eventually forced to flee, when his name appeared on a district list of those to be deported, and emigrated (disguised as a cheese merchant), with another non-juring priest and one whom he had trained. He was eventually allowed to return to Minnecourt but put under surveillance. In 1806 Louvoment was named a titular member of the reconstituted Academy, the Société d'Agriculture.

Although it has been impossible to reconstruct the intellectual background of the majority of the essayists, readers of the Châlons manuscripts -- whether of this century or the eighteenth -- are struck most immediately by the absence of 'érudition' in the majority of the contest essays: the 'eloquence' of these writers drew its power from another source. Aware of the intellectual and reformist currents stirring their society and of the social and economic problems affecting their lives or those for whom they were responsible, these writers appear to be acutely conscious of their own cultural isolation which, coupled with inferior social or professional position, rendered them impotent to do more than speak and act on a limited local level. Without the public essay contests of the Châlons Academy these competitors believed themselves barred from any chance of contributing their views to the great swirl of ideas being discussed by the cultural elite and being examined and essayed by those in government with the authority to introduce reform.

And the frustration bred of cultural isolation and political impotence was not confined to the Academy's rural contestants: even when an essayist had enjoyed a relatively privileged academic education and lived in or near a large urban area -- like the abbé Cauchois, a parish priest to a village outside Rouen -- the social and cultural distance effectively separating him from privileged access to other men of letters was too great to permit any regular form of intellectual discourse. For essayists like Cauchois, the opportunity for intellectual contact afforded by the Academy's contests seems to have been as important as was the Academy's question in prompting the essayist to submit his or her ideas for the Academy's judgement. As the abbé Cauchois explained, in a letter of entreaty he sent to the Academy's secretary,

Si je puis être admis au concours, voudriez vous bien, Monsieur, quelque soit l'événement, me donner votre jugement sur ma manière

d'écrire. Je le recevrai avec reconnoissance [...]. Je suis le plus isolé du monde et privé d'un critique nécessaire pour un commencement.

Clearly, for this parish priest living on the outskirts of a regional capital, the proximity of the Rouen Academy had little bearing on his own cultural solitude.⁴⁷

A SOCIAL, PROFESSIONAL AND GEOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Again and again -- especially in the essays submitted by priests but also in those by country nobles, lawyers and doctors -- we discover the opinions of a portion of the literate public whose views early in the reign of Louis XVI have for the most part eluded historians. These heretofore unknown Frenchmen -- no matter what their 'estate' -- were isolated by geography and, like the curé Cassan, living 'dans les campagnes désertes [...] sans secours de gens de goût et de littérature moderne'.⁴⁸ The comments of these essayists underline the weakness inherent in any social classification of eighteenth-century Frenchmen which fails to take into consideration proximity, or at least access, to urban areas and their cultural contacts. The chagrin of the noble but geographically and

⁴⁷ AD Marne I J 49, letter dated 30 July 1782. The curé as solitary intellectual deserves study. As the following statement, made on the eve of the Revolution, by a rural curé to intellectually privileged canons reveals, the isolation and anger of a Meslier is surely not limited to the rural priests of the Ardennes of Louis XIV's reign: 'Croyez-vous donc, Messieurs, qu'il n'en coûte pas beaucoup d'efforts, de dégoûts et de sacrifices à un prêtre élevé comme vous dans la société, qui y a reçu une education semblable à la vôtre et qui ordinairement a passé ses premières années de ministère dans la ville, de se voir confiné pour toute sa vie dans une campagne où il ne trouve aucun société et où il est au moins renfermé pendant un long hiver?'. Cited from the journal Ecclésiastique Citoyen in Bernard Plongeron, La Vie quotidienne du clergé française au XVIII^e siècle (Paris, Hachette, 1974), p. 145.

⁴⁸ AD Marne I J 41, No. 93. Cassan was curé at Reilhaquet en Quercy in the present Lot département. Although it has not been possible to find a figure for the population of Reilhaquet in the eighteenth century, its present population is 228.

culturally isolated Jourda de Vaux de Foletier from Monistrol en Velay (516 feux) who complained that he lived in a 'petit coin d'un province où l'on ne trouve pas même de bon papier pour écrire décemment' illustrates in perhaps a new way the cultural differences between the town and country which the Revolution made clear on a political scale.⁴⁹

Anyone who seriously attempts to impose a coherent system of social classification upon a geographically and socially disparate group of eighteenth-century Frenchmen must likewise consider the social implications of rural as opposed to urban living. Reading the correspondence and essays of those competing in the Châlons Academy's public essay contests one discovers that the majority of the contest competitors habitually lived beyond the cultural confines of urban elite society and that this fact seems to have been at least as important in the formulation of their social vision -- most particularly of their attitudes towards society's rich and its poor -- than was the 'ordre' history has tried to force upon them. Only as historians have freed themselves and their late eighteenth-century sources from a preemptive classification according to 'ordres' -- what Goubert twenty years ago called a 'Loyseau rebouilli' or the 'Marx torturé' of a premature division of society into 'classes'⁵⁰ -- has it been possible to discover that the information that 24% of the identified Châlons essayists were from the First Order, 14% from the Second and the remainder from the Third may tell us much less about the social -- and

⁴⁹ AD Marne I J 49, letter dated 18 March 1782 from Jourda de Vaux de Foletier to the Academy. For political divisions between town and country see Alfred Cobban, 'Country against Town', in The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution (Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 91-106, and Charles Tilly, 'Local Conflicts in the Vendée before the Rebellion of 1793', French Historical Studies (Fall, 1961), pp. 209-31.

⁵⁰ Pierre Goubert, L'Ancien régime 2: Les pouvoirs (Paris, Armand Colin, 1973), p. 204.

economic -- situation of the essayists than we had once imagined it could.

Gone are many of the old certainties that might have come from knowing that 57 of the identified Châlons essayists were clerics. Of these, for example, only one can be clearly classified as belonging to the upper clergy⁵¹ while the majority lived as vicars and curates on portions congrues which placed them much nearer the people than to the bishops of their own order.⁵² As we shall see, the members of the lower clergy writing for the Academy emerge in their Châlons memoirs as an anticipatory 'advance guard of the attack on privilege' which would not take on its full political significance for the common people until 1789.⁵³

Any illusions one might harbour about a noble esprit de corps are likewise dispelled by a reading of the Châlons sources, which illustrate repetitiously the social and geographic distance separating the noblesse de cour from the provincial nobles who wrote for the Châlons contests. Only a few of them identify themselves first as men of the Second Estate and when they do, their sympathies more frequently lie with the 'pauvres

⁵¹ The rector of the Paris hospital La Salpêtrière and former grand-vicar of Châlons David de Malbosc, who wrote an essay for the Academy's question on begging, AD Marne I J 41, No. 77.

⁵² By mid-century the average income of a bishop was 37,500 livres while a portion congrue was still at 300 livres. 'Chaque congruiste disposait donc de moins du centième du revenu moyen des évêques, un vicaire de moins de 0.4%.' Roland Mousnier, Les Institutions de la France sous la monarchie absolue. (Paris, PUF, 1974), I, 264.

⁵³ Professor McManners illustrates this point with the following passage, quoted in English, from an early revolutionary pamphlet, Le Tableau moral du clergé: 'It is a mistake to attribute a united esprit de corps to the clergy ... Why talk of three orders of citizens? Two suffice; two alone are justified by experience; everyone is enlisted under one of two banners -- nobility and commons ... [These] are the only rallying cries dividing Frenchmen. Like the country itself, the clergy is divided ... The curé is a man of the people'. Quoted by John McManners in The French Revolution and the Church, Harper Torchbooks (New York - Evanston, Harper & Row, 1969), p. 18.

malheureux' round about them in the country (to whom, in one noble essayist's words, 'nous avons tant d'obligations puisque ce sont eux qui nous mettent le pain journallement par leurs travaux indéfatigables') than with 'la noblesse riche qui habite Paris, les grandes villes ou la cour'.⁵⁴ The few provincial nobles who wrote for the Châlons Academy and who lacked active professional occupation also lacked the financial resources either to 'valetter à la cour' or take their place in 'la bonne société'; they were however -- at least on paper and by the fact of responding to the Châlons Academy's contest questions -- able to consider and even suggest radical social change that would involve the elimination of social privileges enjoyed by their order.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ This essayist, the Comte de Saint Belin at Clermont en Beauvoisis, wrote the Academy: 'Ma fortune très médiocre m'a engagé à demeurer la plus grande partie de ma vie à la campagne [...]. Je vis avec une médiocre pension que j'ay obtenue sous le règne de Louis Quinze et c'est presque toute ma ressource.' Unlike the 'branche aînée' of his family, he continued, his 'branche [...] est [...] peu avantagée de la fortune et nous sommes dix enfans'. AD Marne I J 49, letter dated 12 July 1782 from Saint Belin to Sabbathier.

⁵⁵ AD Marne I J 49 No. 41, the comte de Saint Belin. Whereas Professor Forster characterized the provincial noble as 'an active, shrewd and prosperous landlord', the Châlons noble essayists who were 'vivant noblement' often characterized themselves as 'condemned to poverty and idleness in [...] crumbling provincial chateau[x]-- the very picture of the 'stereotype' which Forster argues against. Their remarks perhaps serve to explain why French historians may not have erred nor merely 'been hypnotized by the stereotype' of the poor rural nobility when they sometimes failed to encounter Forster's thrifty, disciplined and shrewd manager-nobles of Toulouse, Bordeaux and Rennes when (re)searching in the back country of provincial France. See Robert Forster, 'The Provincial Noble: A Reappraisal', American Historical Review, 68 (1963), 681-91. The quotations are taken from pp. 683 and 681 of that article.

The miserable social and financial straits of another Châlons essayist, Louis Hervé de Godefroy, seigneur de Boisjungan, were 'immortalized' in verse by one of his twelve sons, the Caen curé Claude-Louis de Godefroy. Godefroy's personal fortune did not permit him to 'caser honorablement cette nombreuse progéniture' (Yves Nedelac, Directeur des Services d'Archives de la Manche). In fact, his own situation was so precarious that three years after he wrote his essay on the rural poor for the Châlons Academy he decided to solicit personally the aid of the king on behalf of his hobereau sons. The interview with Louis XVI actually took place in Bayeux in 1785. According to his son's doggerel, Godefroy announced the calamitous state of their fortunes to his assembled sons who

The majority of the Châlons essayists -- most of whom were technically from the Third Estate -- seem, however, to have defined themselves and their place in French society in terms of active professional function rather than the passive 'peine de naître et rien de plus'. This fortunate fact facilitates their classification according to their occupational role in French society and thus allows the historian to avoid the dangers involved in defining the French 'bourgeois and bourgeoisies'.⁵⁶ In any case, identified strictly by profession, the Châlons essayists would generally have been excluded from what appears to be the eighteenth-century's characterization of that term: the 'non-active [...] man without an occupation, living on the interest from his investments' and 'receiving an income independent of any trade or profession'.⁵⁷

Unfortunately, even a classification of the essayists according to profession is not without its dangers.⁵⁸ Principal among these is the

immediately suggested that they go en masse to Versailles to visit 'sa Majesté très Chrétienne' who would undoubtedly take pity 'quant il verra dans sa maison / douze gas le suivre à la piste pour endosser un habit bleu'. Tony Genty, 'Un Voyage à Versailles (poème de l'Abbé Godefroy de Boisjuge)', Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie, 17 (1893-1905), 337-53.

⁵⁶ See chapters IX and X, 'The Towns and Urban Society' and 'Bourgeois and Bourgeoisies' in Pierre Goubert, The Ancien Regime: French Society, 1600-1750, Harper Torchbooks (New York - San Francisco - London, Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 203-60.

⁵⁷ M. Vovelle and D. Roche, 'Bourgeois, Rentiers and Property Owners: Elements for Defining a Social Category at the End of the Eighteenth Century', in New Perspectives on the French Revolution: Readings in Historical Sociology, edited by Jeffrey Kaplow (New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1965), p. 26.

⁵⁸ Infrequently, I have found essayists who -- like the doctor Grosjean who submitted essays for three of the Academy's competitions and who described himself variously as 'juriste' or 'avocat à Remiremont' -- may have engineered their own social advancement by promoting themselves from their own profession into another more prestigious one, or simply, as may be the case of Grosjean, by adopting the profession of a parent. The

problem of deciding whether to classify an essayist according to his social and professional role at the time he wrote his Châlons essay or according to his eventual occupation at the end of his career. When precise information was available as to the course of the careers of these men who were, in some cases, extremely 'active', I have elected to categorize them according to the first schema.

A brief summary of the career of just one of the Châlons essayists will illustrate the difficulties involved in an exclusive categorization of the essayists. The competitor in question is the Abbé Montlinot who, if classified socially, would automatically be identified with the First Estate. Montlinot studied both theology and medicine in Paris before becoming a canon of the collegial chapter of the church of St Pierre at Lille in 1761. The abbé, who had already written a 'Justification de plusieurs articles de l'Encyclopédie ou préjugés légitimes' (1759), was forced to leave Lille in 1765 (as a result of his Histoire de la ville de Lille which was extremely critical of the immense landholdings of the Church in that region) and renounced his stipend as canon in 1766. Fleeing to Paris, Montlinot set up a bookshop with a Lille printer in league with the publisher Panckoucke. During this period Montlinot continued his literary pursuits, writing the introduction to an Abrégé chronologique de l'histoire de Flandre for Panckoucke, a 'Discours sur l'histoire naturelle'

departmental archivist at Épinal M J.-M. Dumont confirms that Grosjean's father was a lawyer. AD Marne I J 41, No. 76.

In classifying essayists according to profession or occupation one is also presented with the additional problem of multiple occupation. The essayist Gueniot, whom the academy identifies in its published résumé of the competition essays on begging as 'docteur en médecine, associé de l'Académie d'Auxerre', identifies himself not only as doctor but also as 'avocat à la Cour', 'assesseur de la maréchaussée et directeur des postes de Tonnerre'. See Les Moyens de détruire la mendicité (1780 ed.), p. 156 and AD Marne I J 40, No. 50.

which headed the Dictionnaire portatif d'histoire naturelle, an Esprit de la Mothe de Vayer, and numerous articles for the Journal encyclopédique. Soon after competing in the Châlons contest, a competition which his friend Panckoucke also entered, Montlinot (pursued to Paris by his critics in Lille) was sentenced by lettre de cachet to exile in Soissons; there this former abbé, author and bookdealer soon drew the attention of the province's Intendant and the support of Mme Necker, both of whom he had sent his views on what should be done to rationalize and secularize existing practices and policies on poor relief. Meanwhile Montlinot also submitted a slightly altered version of his Châlons essay⁵⁹ for the prize essay competition being held by the Société d'agriculture of Soissons on how to destroy begging in the town, usefully employ her able-bodied poor and assist the vulnerable indigent. The essay, which had already earned an honourable mention in the contest in Châlons, won the prize of Soissons's agricultural society and was then published by its author, first in Soissons and then in Lille in 1779, to draw further public and ministerial attention to the critical problem of the poor in French society and to the disgraced abbé who wanted to put his reform proposals into practice.⁶⁰

Montlinot had by this time gained the confidence of the provincial Intendant Le Peletier, offering him a detailed programme of specific reform recommendations which both men agreed could usefully be implemented in the Soissons dépôt de mendicité in whose administration Montlinot then served.

⁵⁹ Montlinot's Châlons essay, which is quoted extensively in Malvaux's résumé of the essays received for the contest, can be consulted in AD Marne I J 40, No. 66.

⁶⁰ Montlinot, Discours qui a remporté le prix à la Société royale d'Agriculture de Soissons, en l'année 1779, sur cette question: 'Quels sont les moyens de détruire la mendicité dans la ville de Soissons' (Lille, C. Lehoucq, 1779).

When, therefore, late in 1780 the Crown's financial difficulties prompted Necker to undertake cost-cutting measures to reduce the number of dépôts, the Controller General used this as an occasion to introduce reforms in public assistance which reflected his own views on the matter. Early in 1781 he appointed Montlinot inspector and director of a reformed Soissons dépôt which was to be run in consultation with the minister and intendant and designed to function as a maison de travail for the whole of the province, replacing its three existing dépôts and serving as a working model for the reform of institutionalized public assistance for all the dépôts in the realm.⁶¹

The rationality and justice of the treatment meted out to the poor in the reformed Soissons dépôt gained widespread public notice for Montlinot's ideas about what could be done to help the un- and under-employed poor and to introduce practices within the dépôts which would give work and promote the rehabilitation of the institutionalized poor. His work there led to the publication of a number of other influential works which addressed the problems of the poor and society's responsibilities to them: his État actuel de dépôt de Soissons for 1781 was the first of several annual accounts publicizing the reformist work undertaken in collaboration with the province's intendant and with the support of ministers; it was followed by his Observations sur les enfants trouvés de

⁶¹ According to the account of events Necker published three years later in his De l'administration des finances of 1784, the minister selected Montlinot for his 'intelligence et l'esprit d'ordre d'un ecclésiastique qui avait déjà développé son aptitude particulière à ce genre d'administration'. Montlinot revolutionized the administration of the dépôt, making work obligatory and universal, establishing two glass-polishing workshops sponsored by the Saint-Gobain manufacture and paying the workers up to 15 livres a month or more and, in the textile workshops paying the detainees by the piece. He established a system of beggar trustees as guards and, a medical doctor himself, Montlinot appointed an in-house surgeon and nurses and authorized a doctor and midwife whenever necessary. For the quotation from Necker and details of Montlinot's administration of the dépôt see Bloch, L'Assistance et l'État, pp. 221-22.

la generalité de Soissons, which publicized research undertaken at the behest of a finance minister concerned by the rising number of foundlings.⁶² It was, however, the essay contest of the Châlons Academy which had given the abbé administrator his first opportunity to express in print his criticism of previous government programmes to repress and contain the poor and to campaign for the introduction of radical new reforms in the government's attitudes and policies with regard to the able-bodied poor, proposals which formed the basis of the practices he then essayed in the Soissons dépôt, elaborated in his subsequent publications, and pursued legislatively when the revolutionary assemblies took their turn at solving the problems of France's poor.

When the Revolution came, Montlinot completely separated himself from the Church. He gave up his title (he had not profited from his benefice for more than twenty years) and at the age of sixty married and fathered children. He was soon named to the newly-formed Comité de Mendicité and suggested and obtained the membership on that committee of two other men who had also competed in the contests of the Châlons Academy -- the former premier commis to Turgot Paul François Boncerf and the impoverished 'inspecteur des apprentis' at the Paris Hôpital général Jean-François Lambert -- with whom Montlinot would lead an unsuccessful campaign for government establishment of massive public works projects.⁶³ Montlinot eventually became head of the Bureau des hospices civils and of the

⁶² Publication of the dépôt's annual accounts appeared for the years 1781, 1782, 1783 and 1784/85; Montlinot prefaced his accounts for 1786 with an 'Essai sur la mendicité' which was published in 1789. See quérard, VI, 53 and Dinaux, pp. 139-40. Montlinot also wrote the article 'dépôts de mendicité' for the Encyclopédie Méthodique, which appeared in Liège in 1786.

⁶³ Bloch et Tuetey, Procès verbaux et rapport du Comité de Mendicité de la Constituante, 1790-1791 (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1911), xviii-xix.

Commission exécutive des secours public and then head of the Second Division of the Ministry of the Interior following service with the republican armies in Italy. He was also an editor and contributor to the Clef du cabinet des souverains, a new morning and evening newspaper which began appearing in 1797.⁶⁴ Thus, although Montlinot has for present purposes been classified according to his activities during the period in which he wrote and the Academy published much of his Châlons essay, that is, as a local administrative official working under orders from the provincial government, this priest who was variously author, publicist, book dealer, poor house director and married civil servant had displayed anything but solidarity with his original confrères among the canons in the collegial church of St Peter's of Lille. Montlinot therefore offers a near perfect illustration of the dangers inherent in a rigid system of social and professional classification.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ The various stages in Montlinot's career as priest, publicist and public servant have been assembled from photocopied documents supplied by M. Ph. Rosset of the Archives du Nord and from the following printed sources: Bloch, L'Assistance et l'État (scattered references throughout the whole of that work); Bloch and Tuetey, Procès-verbaux et rapports du Comité de Mendicité, xviii-xix; Arthur Dinaux, 'Notice sur l'abbé de Montlinot', Archives historiques et littéraires du Nord de la France et du Midi de la Belgique, Nouvelle série, II (1832), 133-40; Alfred Darimon, 'Lettre adressée à A. Dinaux à propos de sa notice sur Montlinot' in Ibid, 394-400; and Louis Trénard, 'L'Influence de Voltaire à Lille', Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 58 (1967), 1607-34. For the most recent and fullest account of Montlinot's life and work, including a detailed exposition of his antagonistic relationship with the Paris Intendant Bertier de Sauvigny as well as an analysis of the Soissons essay and Montlinot's article on the dépôts for the Encyclopédie Méthodique see Adams, Bureaucrats and Beggars, pp. 189-231, 235-39 and 247-50. I am grateful to Dr Adams for his willingness to discuss his then unpublished original findings on this topic with me almost twenty years ago at the Yale Enlightenment Congress in New Haven.

⁶⁵ Montlinot is not the only essayist whose careers crossed several social and professional boundaries. As we have seen, the Châlons Academy's permanent secretary, who competed in the contest on the begging poor, was at the same time a successful competitor in international academic prize contests, for many years a teacher in the local collège, a prolific writer of school textbooks and a paper manufacturer. Although he is obviously an excellent example of the homme de lettres, he is nevertheless classified

By classifying the essayists according to their profession at the time they submitted their first essay to the Châlons Academy it is possible to obtain a more accurate description of the men whose social vision emerges in the Châlons essays. Table I is a socio-occupational classification of the identified essayists writing for all the Academy's contests between 1776 and 1789. Table IIA categorizes only those who wrote for the Academy's contest questions on the begging and labouring poor. It is their views which will be the focus of Part III.⁶⁶ However, despite all efforts to locate the essayists in the professional hierarchy of late eighteenth-century France, what distinguishes these authors is not so much their professional classification as their response to the need for reform. By the very act of writing their essays for the Châlons contests, these essayists from every social and professional category demonstrated their openness to publicly advocated but governmentally effected social reform. And, since the essays that resulted express a general consensus as to what form these reforms should take, the correlation between an essayists' specific profession and his attitude toward reform would seem less important than the fact that professional activities daily exposed the

in Tables I and II with the 'Manufacturers and Merchants' because, at the time he wrote his Châlons essay he had ceased teaching and launched his paper plant near Châlons and because, according to the report made by the Champagne Inspecteur des manufactures to the Royal Academy of Sciences, 'M Sabbathier surveille par lui-même toute sa fabrication avec le plus grand soin' and himself learned all the techniques necessary to establish and run his business. See Creveaux, Les Anciennes Papeteries de la Marne, pp. 17-18.

⁶⁶ The most notable disparity between the two tables is the reduced number of essayists coming from the legal professions and from engineers, which is due in large measure to the fact that in Table I are included the essayists writing on the academy's three questions on judicial reform and those writing on the reform of the corvée, which were dominated by essayists whose participation in these contests reflected their professional interest in the subject. Table II gives the professional classification for all the Academy's contest essayists.

TABLE I
SOCIO-OCCUPATIONAL POSITIONS OF ALL CONTEST ESSAYISTS

	Beg- gers	Corvus	Provin admin	Legal reform	Rural poor	Educa- tion	Com- merce	Mar- riage	Wood	Patric- ianism	Ten- tilles	Emigra- tion	Arid land	Bank- ruptcy	No. of essays	No. of essayists
Upper secular clergy	6	2	-	1	1	4	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	15	14
Lower secular clergy	16	4	-	1	6	4	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	34	32
Lower regular clergy	6	4	-	2	2	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	15
Total for Clergy	28	10	-	4	9	10	2	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	66	61
Titled nobles	4	2	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	10	10
Royal Administrators at nat'l or prov'l levels	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	2
Noble officers in the sovereign courts	3	2	-	5	1	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	8
Noble officers in lower courts & administration	3	1	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	4
Noble officers in the military or mercantile	8	4	-	2	2	4	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	22	17
Nobles in the professions	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
Total for Nobles	22	9	1	8	5	12	2	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	62	44
Officers in lower courts	3	3	1	3	3	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	16	16
Non-noble administrators	10	3	1	1	-	1	-	-	3	-	-	2	1	-	22	19
Notaries or official clerks	2	1	-	3	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	6
Lawyers	9	6	2	14	1	6	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	1	42	36
Doctors	3	1	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	8	7
Professors	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Engineers or architects	2	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	10
Merchants	1	1	-	-	1	-	2	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	7	7
Manufacturers	6	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	11	9
Bourgouls	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	6	5
Private teachers	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
Savants & musicians	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Students	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	2	2
Shopkeepers	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Artisans	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Peasants	4	1	-	-	4	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	12	11
Total for 3rd Estate	47	26	4	25	13	12	4	1	10	1	1	6	3	1	153	137
TOTAL IDENTIFIED	97	45	5	37	27	34	8	2	10	6	1	6	3	1	282	242

TABLE II
PROFESSIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF IDENTIFIED ESSAYISTS
COMPETING IN THE CONTESTS OF THE CHALONS ACADEMY
1776-1788

CLERGY 48 or 21%				MILITARY, MARECHAUSSEE & POLICE 20 or 9%		
UPPER	CANONS	REGULAR	PRIESTS & CURATES	MILITARY	NAVAL	MARECHAUSSEE/POLICE
1	6	13	28	10	3	7

AGENTS OF PRINCELY HOUSES 4 or 2%	NOBLES & BOURGEOIS "VIVANT NOBLEMENT" 11 or 5%
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CIVIL SERVICE 33 or 14%					
CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICIAL	LOCAL	CENTRAL FINANCIAL OFFICIAL	LOCAL	SUPERIOR COURT MAGISTRATE	LOWER
1	3	3	3	11	12

LEGAL PROFESSIONS 49 or 21%				
JURISCONSULTS	LAWYERS PARIS PARL.	PROVINCIAL LAWYERS	NOTARIES OR CLERKS	PETTY SWORN OFFICES
3	12	24	6	4

MEN OF LETTERS & ARTS 19 or 8%			MEDICAL PROFESSIONS 9 or 4%		ENGINEERS 12 or 5%
EDUCATORS LAY CLERICAL	WRITERS	MUSICIAN	DOCTORS	SURGEON	
5 9	4	1	8	1	

MANUFACTURERS & MERCHANTS 14 or 6%			MANUAL TRADES 2 or 1%	LABOUREURS 12 or 5%
MANUFACTURERS	WHOLESALEERS	RETAILERS		
5	4	5		

TABLE II A
PROFESSIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF IDENTIFIED ESSAYISTS
WRITING ON THE BEGGING & LABORING POOR
FOR CONTESTS OF THE CHALONS ACADEMY

CLERGY 25 or 24%				MILITARY, MARECHAUSSEE & POLICE 11 or 10%		
UPPER	CANONS	REGULAR	PRIESTS & CURATES	MILITARY	NAVAL	MARECHAUSSEE/POLICE
1	1	7	16	5	1	5

AGENTS OF PRINCELY HOUSES 2 or 2%	NOBLES & BOURGEOIS "VIVANT NOBLEMENT" 4 or 4%
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CIVIL SERVICE 13 or 12%					
CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICIAL	LOCAL	CENTRAL FINANCIAL OFFICIAL	LOCAL	SUPERIOR COURT MAGISTRATE	LOWER
1	3	0	2	4	3

LEGAL PROFESSIONS 15 or 14%				
JURISCONSULTS	LAWYERS PARIS PARL.	PROVINCIAL LAWYERS	NOTARIES OR CLERKS	PETTY SWORN OFFICES
2	3	7	3	0

MEN OF LETTERS & ARTS 12 or 11%			MEDICAL PROFESSIONS 6 or 6%		ENGINEERS 1 or 1%
EDUCATORS LAY CLERICAL	WRITERS	MUSICIAN	DOCTORS	SURGEON	
4 5	2	1	5	1	

MANUFACTURERS & MERCHANTS 6 or 6%			MANUAL TRADES 2 or 2%	LABOUREURS 9 or 8%
MANUFACTURERS	WHOLESALEERS	RETAILERS		
2	1	3		

majority of the essayists to the extremes of rich and poor in their society and the problems that this provoked and could provoke.⁶⁷

No matter what their professional training had been -- whether in the Church's seminaries or the great medical faculties like that at Montpellier -- life had subsequently set many of these essayists down in the countryside where a whole new set of problems required a new perspective. Country priests, lawyers and doctors who had at least for a season in their lives learned that problems had solutions if undertaken and studied by men of reason were thrust into a world where one's fate was providential and seemingly immutable. For these men, the books they had once studied, once somewhere read, were sometimes but a distant memory -- 'idées' which 'sont restées imprimées dans mon cerveau' (as one essayist wrote) even though they were no longer 'sous ma main'.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ There is little need to labour the point that curés, maréchaussée officers, civil servants, merchants and doctors were all exposed professionally to the problems of a society in which the disparity between rich and poor was daily on the increase. The following is but another example of the special vantage point of the professionally active in viewing both the rich and the poor among their 'clientele'. Writing about the eighteenth century doctor, the abbé Berthe, modern historian of the eighteenth-century Société littéraire of Arras, remarks: 'On relève habituellement leur présence dans les milieux forts contrastés: les classes riches, les privilégiés et les bourgeois à l'aise d'une part, les pauvres également; car si le bas peuple des villes et le journalier des campagnes ne sont pas leur clientèle habituelle, c'est cependant à ceux que l'on fait appel lorsque l'indigent est à la dernière extrémité'. Léon Noël Berthe, Dubois de Fosseux: Secrétaire de l'Académie d'Arras, 1785-1792 et son bureau de correspondance (Arras, chez l'auteur, 1969), p. 260.

⁶⁸ AD Marne I J 47, No. 2. I have been unable to identify the author of this essay written for the Academy's question on the reform of penal laws. What he may no longer have had to hand may well have been the journal or digest where he had read extracts from books which had given him the ideas he mentioned in his Châlons memoir.

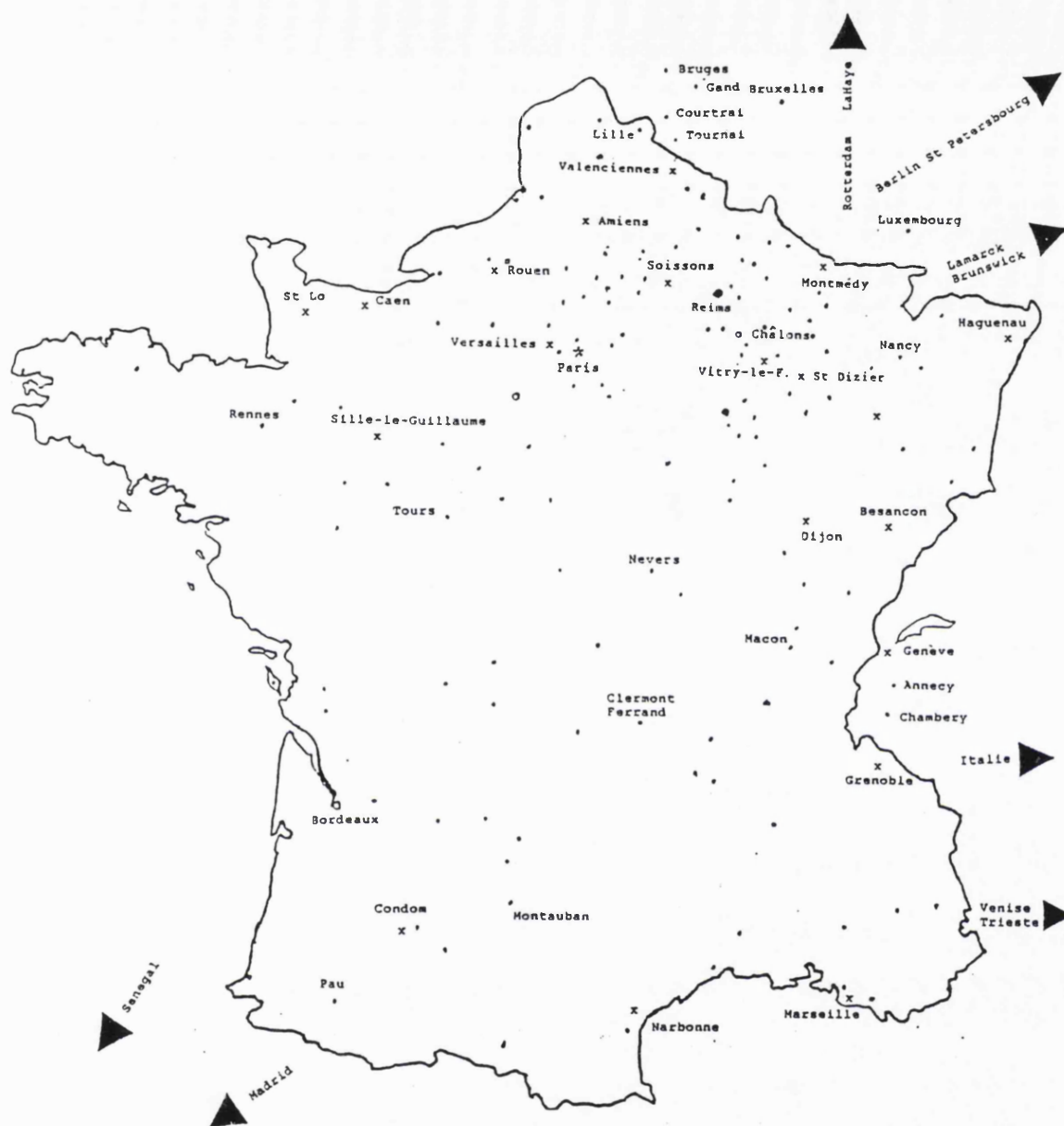
When the essayists are considered solely from the perspective of their geographic distribution (see Map I), we discover that nearly two-thirds of the 296 essays whose geographic point of origin has been determined came from locales that even men in the eighteenth century would not have considered 'urban'. Twenty-three essays issued from foreign capitals -- Venice, Madrid, Rotterdam, Saint-Petersburg, Berlin, Geneva, Luxembourg, and several from small Belgian and German cities -- and another thirty-six came from Paris. But the remainder of the essayists divide unevenly between the 62 who came from towns considered urban by eighteenth-century standards, with populations of 10,000 or more, and those from non-urban areas: 71 essayists from towns of at least 5,000; and the 105 essayists (or 35% of the total) from small market towns and hamlets with populations as small as Pons-de-Vaux (13 feux), Chalus par Limoges (32 feux) or Cheppy (45 feux).⁶⁹

In the light of the fact that the population of eighteenth-century France was overwhelmingly rural,⁷⁰ the percentage of Châlons competitors submitting essays from non-urban areas is not high at just under 60%. It

⁶⁹ The list of essayists from areas that were no more than bourgs or hamlets is surprisingly long and, as we shall see, represents over one-half of the essayists who submitted essays on the questions dealing with the begging and labouring poor. There were essays sent from places like Minnecourt (43 feux), Mohon (44 feux), Courcelles (60 feux), Berni Rivière (75 feux), and, above these, a whole range of tiny provincial centres like Chaise Dieu in Auvergne (296 feux), Clermont en Beauvoisis (495 feux) and Monistrol en Velay (516 feux). On the advice and with the assistance of M Philippe Sueur, Professor at Paris VIII, I have used the Abbé Expilly's Dictionnaire géographique, historique et politique des Gaules et de la France (Amsterdam, 1764) and G. Bellart, P. Bougard and C. Rollet, Paris et communes de France. Dictionnaire d'histoire: Administrative et démographique (Pas de Calais, Université de Lille III) as sources in determining population.

The map showing the geographic distribution of the Châlons essayists could not have been prepared without the help of Professor Philippe Sueur.

⁷⁰ Pierre Goubert numbers the entire 'urban' population -- i.e., those dwelling in towns with a population of at least 10,000 -- at scarcely three million or 15% of the entire population of eighteenth-century France. Goubert, 'The Towns and Urban Society', in The Ancien Regime, p. 203.



GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF THE CHALONS ESSAYISTS

• 1 essayist

x 2-5 essayists

o 6-10 essayists

o 11 essayists

* 36 essayists

(Paris)

is high and significantly so if the figure is seen from the perspective of the historian of ideas who only rarely has opportunity to study the ideas and opinions of men and women dwelling outside large urban centres and commonly denied the cultural intercourse of literary society or reading club. In ordinary circumstance such people had little occasion to record in writing their social, economic and political vision. Therefore, in drafting their 'essays' and submitting them to the Châlons Academy for judgement, they have given the modern reader privileged access to the pre-revolutionary social vision of men whose views have heretofore largely eluded the historian's grasp. Thus, although we may regret what one of the essayists -- Payan who, despite his medical training, claimed to have been 'entièrement livré depuis 32 ans à l'agriculture' -- apologetically called a 'stille du campagnard',⁷¹ we discover in their essays a France quite unlike that described by many of the urban denizens of the Republic of Letters. The vision of France that emerges from the Châlons essays reflects neither the philosophe's vast contempt for the past nor his supreme confidence in reason to transform the future.

The Châlons essayists, perhaps because of daily occupations that kept them close to the country, relied heavily upon their own experience and understanding of the past, upon their own experience and upon the realities and frustrations of every-day existence to inform their assessment of society's problems and of potential solutions. Without underestimating the role that Reason and its priests could play in transforming society, they seem to have realized that their own unique contribution to reform would come not from any grandiloquent 'citation des quelques extraits des livres' but rather from their exposition of reform suggestions informed by what one of the essayists described as 'une expérience réfléchie depuis plus de 25

⁷¹ AD Marne I J 47, No. 5.

ans et soutenue par les faits'. Mature men, living in honourable but national obscurity in the farther recesses of the French provinces, they competed in these public essay contests believing that their provincial existence especially qualified them to reply to the Châlons Academy's questions which, unlike those of other academic bodies, freed them from preoccupations with 'style parce que la question proposée ne demande pas un discours académique mais un mémoire'.⁷² As one laboureur essayist wrote, the Châlons Academy, by its own earnest pursuit of useful ideas on how to improve the prospects and ameliorate the plight of ordinary Frenchmen, had permitted men who had 'éprouvé tous les risques [...] et la misère de la culture' to 'azarder [...] réflexions sur la question proposée'.⁷³ And, as another essayists (who called himself 'un rustique littérateur') realistically noted, although the essays they wrote might not reflect 'les conceptions d'un philosophe' nor 'frappent par un air de nouveauté et de découverte',⁷⁴ neither did they bear 'toutes les apparences du vrai' which might issue forth from 'la plume d'un speculatif systémateur'. What these essayists believed they were able to offer were suggestions able to 'soutenir la redoutable épreuve de l'expérience'.⁷⁵ Experience had been their teacher and had shown them that the every day realities of working men were more pertinent to the Châlons Academy's

⁷² AD Marne I J 49, No. 17.

⁷³ AD Marne I J 49, No. 42.

⁷⁴ AD Marne I J 49, No. 40, the Abbé Cauchois.

⁷⁵ AD Marne I J 38, No. 23, the Abbé Blanchard, from Tourteron in the Ardennes.

concerns than the 'formalités' that might be required for the discourses of other academic bodies.⁷⁶

The public essay contests of the popular Châlons Academy presented predominantly provincial Frenchmen -- often 'fixé depuis longtemps à la campagne',⁷⁷ -- with an uncommon opportunity to air personal opinions which though imperfectly expressed had the substantiality of truths fervently held. The essays that resulted are of inestimable value to the social historian of pre-revolutionary France, granting him unexpected entry into a world peopled not with the philosophes of the Enlightenment but rather the labouring poor of the France outside the salons and academies.

⁷⁶ The term is taken from an apologetic letter sent to the Academy after the awarding of its prizes for essays written on the labouring poor question. '[...] comme je n'ay jamais envoyé de mémoire, ni de discours dans aucune académie, j'ignorais absolument les formalités'. AD Marne I J 49. The letter is dated 30 July 1782.

⁷⁷ AD Marne I J 41, No. 91. The essayist is the former cavalry captain de Moineville. 'Nourris de l'enfance au milieu des armes, fixé depuis longtemps à la campagne, je dois me borner à rendre mes idées le plus clairement qu'il me sera possible: heureux si je deviens véritablement utile à ma patrie.'

PART THREE

THE PUBLIC, THE POOR AND A CALL FOR RADICAL REFORM:

THE ESSAY CONTESTS OF 1776-1777 AND 1782-1783

IV

A CONSENSUS VIEW OF THE PROBLEM, ITS CAUSES AND EFFECTS

When in 1776 the Châlons Academy inaugurated its public essay contests by posing the question 'Quels sont les moyens de détruire la mendicité en rendant les mendiants utiles à l'Etat sans les rendre malheureux?' the public response was so great and so unexpected that even the organizers of the contest expressed astonishment:

Elle [l'Académie] n'osoit pas se flatter d'attirer l'attention d'un aussi grand nombre de Concurrens que ceux qui se sont présentés dans la lice. L'Académie étoit encore au berceau, & c'étoit la première Couronne qu'elle devoit donner. Mais on a bien voulu ne pas dédaigner le suffrage d'une Société naissante.¹

For its first contest the Châlons Academy received at least 126 essays (118 of them in time to compete for its prize). When this total is compared with the average number of essays received by all the other provincial academies in the eighteenth century it emerges, as we have seen, that the number of essays received by the Châlons Academy for its first contest was eighteen times the national average.

When six years later the academy posed a second, broader question on the nation's labouring poor --

sur les moyens d'améliorer en France la condition des laboureurs, des journaliers et des gens de peine vivant à la campagne, celle de leurs femmes et leurs enfants

-- essays once again poured into Châlons from all across the country and this despite the fact that word had already begun to spread about

¹ It was the Abbé Malvaux, whom the Academy asked to put together the published résumé of the contest essays, who expressed their view. See his preface to Les Moyens de détruire la mendicité en France (1780 edition), vii.

Vergennes' opposition to several of the Academy's contest questions and his confiscation of the essays submitted for a contest in 1780. Clearly the Châlons Academy in posing questions on the plight of France's begging and labouring poor had struck upon topics which sparked intense public interest.

DISPARATE VOICES BUT A CONSENSUS VIEW

Despite the six years that separated these contests and questions which would seem to call for essays about beggars, in the first instance, and about the labouring people of rural France, in the second, the arguments and proposals advanced in these two sets of competition essays about the nature and extent of the problems being faced and caused by these ostensibly different social and economic groups were remarkably similar. Although they were addressing two very differently worded questions, the competitors in both contests began from the premise that poverty, indigency and begging were intimately related and used their essays to advance the notion that the problems posed and suffered by France's desperate poor could be solved only within the context of social and economic reforms which would address the inequities which kept the majority of labouring people in France in conditions of poverty and bare subsistence. 'La mendicité', commented a competitor in the Academy's first contest, 'ne doit son existence qu'à la pauvreté; cette cause détruite, son effet doit cesser à l'instant'.² Yet, even the most optimistic among the essayists was

² AD Marne I J 39, No. 47. The essayist is the municipal officer and newly-named procureur du roi for the royal forest of Fontainebleau Jean-François Dubois. I am grateful to M. Charles-Henri Lerch and the departmental archives of the Seine-et-Marne for details about Dubois's income and about the creation of his post, conseiller procureur du Roi en la maîtrise des eaux et forêts et capitainerie royale des chasses de Fontainebleau, in early 1777.

forced to recognize that poverty was the best most people in the labouring classes could hope for and that, without reserves, the merely poor were often forced into begging and destitution when hard times came, as they so often did. And so these essayists, men who at the Châlons Academy's bidding were attempting to offer practical suggestions to the problems posed by the Academy's questions, insisted that before they could discuss ways to eliminate begging or improve the plight of the labouring poor they must first set forth their understanding of 'les causes naturelles ou politiques, physiques ou morales d'où dérive une indigence aussi étendue'.³

Read together the essays the Academy received for these two contests therefore allow us to put together a composite picture of those who had not benefited from the prosperity which for many had marked most of the decades of Louis XV's reign. The France which concerned the writers of these essays was peopled with subjects who had gained nothing from the liberalization of the grain trade, the increase in prices and rents or the expansion in industry and commerce which had brought prosperity to a minority. Indeed, the people whose plight prompted these essayists to write were the millions of men, women and children whose labour fueled the prosperity of the minority but whose own livelihoods appeared increasingly precarious and whose prospects seemed to be deteriorating with each year of the new reign. Drawn in isolation by men themselves from a broad cross-section of the educated but politically silent public, the portrait of France's poor that emerged from these essays shared common and, for the most part, sympathetic features. Both the essayists' views and the complimentary nature of the subjects they were treating therefore make a

³ AD Marne I J 39, No. 28. The essayist is a lawyer living in Paris, De la Joise Prioul.

detailed analysis of the manuscripts for these two contests together both logical and broadly significant as an important measure of the literate public's awareness of the needs and grievances of those whom the Châlons essayists consistently describe as the majority in the nation, France's 'classes laboureuses'; their suffering and the need for national measures to promote their interests and to recognize the legitimacy of their claims for assistance from the rest of society emerge in these essays as a prescient Cahier des Pauvres years before one of the Châlons competitors would himself draft and publish such a document.

One hundred and fifty-two essayists submitted manuscripts to the Châlons Academy for these two contests. Seventeen were written by foreigners or Frenchmen living in eight different foreign countries, but the vast majority of the competitors were Frenchmen living in relative obscurity somewhere in areas that would eventually make up forty-eight revolutionary départements.⁴

A regional overview reveals a heavy representation of essayists from rural areas and from départements of the north and east where literacy was highest; but, there were also scattered essayists from the south and west.⁵ A social breakdown of the identified essayists according to estate

⁴ The départements with the heaviest participation are the Marne (17); the Ardennes, Aube and Seine-Maritime with 5 each; the Haute Marne, Aisne, Oise and Gironde with 4 each; the Manche, Maine-et-Loire, Nord, Somme, Seine-et-Marne, Meuse, Hérault and the Alpes de Haute Provence with 3 each; the Vosges, Yonne, Dordogne, Calvados, Yvelines, Nièvre, Pas-de-Calais, Doubs, Lot, Pyrénées-Atlantiques, Haute Vienne with 2 each. The other 20 départements are represented by only one essayist. There were 16 essayists from Paris and of the 17 essays sent from abroad, 5 came from Belgium, 3 from Italy, 3 from Spain, 2 from Germany and one each from Switzerland, Holland, Russia and Belfort. Two more essayists came from an unspecified area within Champagne and a third essayist came from somewhere in the north, claiming extensive knowledge of the Hainault, Flanders, Picardy and Artois.

⁵ In certain areas in the northeast male literacy reached as high as 80%. France itself was divided by a sort of literary frontier which ran from Mont St. Michel to Besançon or Geneva. North of that line literacy was

shows that 27% were from the First Estate, 19% from the Second Estate and 54% from the Third. The breakdown according to occupation -- which was given in Table II -- gives a more detailed picture still of the professional diversity of this disparate group of socially-concerned Frenchmen. Simply by writing memoirs, however poorly executed, for the Châlons contests, these essayists demonstrated some measure of literacy; nevertheless, they were, in general, isolated -- if not consciously excluded -- from active membership in the academies and also from the more broadly-based Republic of Letters. Only 11% of them dared to claim even the most tenuous tie to any official academy or agricultural society, or even to a local literary society, while four-fifths of them have left no known record of any other published or unpublished literary endeavour except their Châlons essays. And yet, though these often unsophisticated essayists frequently entreat the judging Châlons academicians to overlook spelling and grammar mistakes and apologize for what the essayists themselves term the 'rustic simplicity' of their style, they make no apologies for the harsh truths about social and economic conditions prevailing within the country that their essays reveal. As one maréchaussée officer wrote bluntly: 'Qu'il me soit permis [...] de demander grâce à mes juges pour le stile mais non pour les choses'.⁶

always above 25%, whereas south of it the rate was usually under 25%. Fourteen of the 152 essays were sent from départements south and west of that frontier. See Michel Fleury and Pierre Valmary, 'Le Progrès de l'instruction élémentaire de Louis XIV à Napoleon III d'après l'enquête de Louis Maggiolo (1877-1879)', Population (1957, No. 1), pp. 71-92.

⁶ AD Marne I J 40, No. 58. The essayist is the maréchaussée officer Charles Gabriel de la Balme, who described himself as follows: 'C'est un militaire très peu lettré qui écrit avec bonhomie ce qu'il pense et qui n'a d'autre prétension que d'aimer sincèrement son Roi et sa patrie.' The frequency with which the Châlons essayists ask for literary leniency from their academician judges is indicative of the distance between these essayists and the hommes de lettres who frequented polite salon society. The unschooled laboureur Descaure provides another illustration of the lack of cultural sophistication felt by many of the Châlons essayists:

The Frenchmen writing for these two contests were country doctors and lawyers, farmers, parish priests and petty government officials whose preoccupation with the problems of France's poor was explained by their own first-hand knowledge of it. For these writers practical experience had most often taken the place of more formal and abstract 'enlightenment'. And yet they argued that, contrary to what those in more enlightened circles might think, it was precisely this practical experience which enabled them to provide more realistic solutions to the Châlons Academy's very down-to-earth questions than could the armchair reformers of most academies and salons. While the physiocrats and philosophes -- described by one essayist as foolish creatures who believed they had 'plus de lumières que le commun des hommes'⁷ -- turned out treatise after treatise prophesying the imminent advent of the reign of happiness upon the earth, the men who wrote in response to the Châlons Academy's questions on the begging and labouring poor claimed that they were being forced to grapple on a daily basis with the practical problems and human casualties of a social and economic system that left the people anything but happy. The Academy's contests, its prizes and its repeated public assurances to consider any essay which contained useful views offered these obscure Frenchmen the incentive and the occasion they needed to voice opinions about a problem that would ultimately determine the shape of their future and the destiny of the nation.

Their essays allow us to glimpse a rather different view of late eighteenth-century society from that presented by those who were benefiting or hoped to benefit from its prosperity. The testimony of these essays is

'J'avertis que je n'ai point d'étude. Ainsi j'espère grâce sur les fautes.' AD Marne I J 40, No. 63.

⁷ AD Marne I J 39, No. 29. Rabigot Delacroix.

of an uneasy, impatient France without other public forums in which to express discontent. Their memoirs for the Châlons Academy were a conscious attempt to add the voices of ordinary Frenchmen to a debate currently dominated by society's elites. A farmer, inspired by the Academy's contest, wrote elsewhere expressing the frustrated views of many:

Jusqu'ici les riches et les écrivains mercenaires soudoyés par eux ont été en possession de faire part au public de leurs rêveries touchant le bonheur des peuples. N'est-il pas temps qu'un homme sans titre, sans biens, & sans ambition fasse aussi connoître ce qu'il pense sur un article qui l'intéresse autant que personne.⁸

Whether they realized it or not, the essayists in these contests were in many ways the felicitous finale to the enlightenment's campaign to arouse public opinion to the necessity of reform. Yet, the men who wrote these essays were far too familiar with the sight of the unemployed artisan, the debt-ridden farmer and the jobless unskilled worker to accept with the Church and the philosophes that the poor could realistically be sorted out into vrais and mauvais pauvres; nor could the essayists condone the physiocrats' enlightened self-interest in promoting the progressive proletarianization of the work-force with no regard for the immediate fate of families made destitute by their policies on land consolidation and free-market grain prices. The poor were not for these essayists alien creatures whose 'happiness' could be contemplated philosophically nor faceless

⁸ Gosselin, 'Réflexions d'un citoyen adressées aux notables sur la question proposée par un grand roi: "En quoi consiste le bonheur des peuples & quels sont les moyens de le procurer?" ou sur cette autre: "D'où vient la misère des peuples, quels sont les moyens d'y remédier?"' (Paris, 1787). Though this essay postdates the Academy's contest, both the title and the author's reference to the Châlons Academy's contest in his preface (v-vi) confirm that this essay was at least inspired by the Academy's question on the beggar. Charles-Robert Gosselin was the son of a peasant; as a boy he pursued studies and for a time seems to have worked as a teacher. Thereafter, he himself took to agriculture, working hard to make a living from a small plot of land he had bought with savings from his work. For more information on Gosselin see André Lichtenberger, 'Charles-Robert Gosselin: Un précurseur oublié du socialisme au XVIII^e siècle', La Révolution française, 22 (Jan-Juin 1892), 481-97.

figures in an economic equation whose eventual sum was national prosperity. For them, 'the poor' meant neighbours and acquaintances or, increasingly, hordes of hungry children or desperate fathers and mothers. Their misery was a persistent reminder that behind the glittering prosperity promised by philosophe and physiocrat and enjoyed by an elite in French society there lay a dark and desperate struggle for existence that was the daily lot of the majority of Frenchmen.

Despite the apparent prosperity of the French economy, observation had persuaded these men that the purchasing power of significant numbers within the French population was declining. Forced to deal on a daily basis with poor who could not be neatly divided into the enlightenment's categories of pauvre, indigent and mendiant, these essayists had been forced, as well, to recognize that existing practices and policies could not long contain the tide of what one essayist aptly described as the 'armée des malheureux qui inonde les villes et les campagnes'.⁹ The prescriptions of official policy, whether the voluntary resources of the faithful or the repressive policies of a beggar-ridden state, were in their view demonstrably inadequate.¹⁰ Impelled more by the social and economic imperatives of the poor whom they saw everywhere about them than by the logical imperatives of physiocratic thinkers who, like Dupont de Nemours,

⁹ AD Marne I J 40, No. 70. Sabbathier.

¹⁰ Olwen Hufton in her book The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750-1789 (Oxford University Press, 1974) estimated the figure for France's poor and indigent population to be at least a third and perhaps as much as a half of the nation. Her research revealed that the formal resources available to meet these needs was in the order of 5 to 10 livres per year per indigent in those départements with the most charitable resources and less than what could buy one loaf of bread per year per pauper in those départements least favoured. Hufton, The Poor, p. 176.

were championing a 'bien qui se fait tout seul'¹¹ -- The French equivalent of the 'invisible hand' -- these essayists present us with a view of late eighteenth-century society missing from the textbooks of their own or our century. The social and economic vision that emerges from their essays does not reflect an indiscriminate acceptance of the liberal doctrines of either physiocrat or philosophe nor does it conform to the conservative image of academic society projected by some studies of the High Enlightenment and the views we would expect to read from the pens of provincials with sufficient time, interest and education to compete in prize essay contests.¹²

Indeed, contrary to what one would expect to be the nature and direction of enlightened public opinion in the seventies and eighties, a careful reading of these essays reveals at least four important (and surprising) facts about public perceptions of the significance for society as a whole of France's majority poor population. From these essays we learn first, that already early in the reign of Louis XVI, a significant sample of the literate populace was very much aware of the extraordinarily high and increasing incidence of poverty and indigence within the labouring population; second, that this public had accepted that the primary explanation of the problem was not moral but economic; third, that they were convinced that existing funds and methods of relief and repression

¹¹ Dupont de Nemours, 'Discours préliminaire' to Physiocratie, I, 81, quoted by Georges Weulersse, Le Mouvement physiocratique en France de 1756 à 1770 (Paris, Mouton, réimpression, 1968), II, 41.

¹² An essential distinction must be made between the purpose of this section of my inquiry and earlier and excellent studies of the provincial academies and their membership like Daniel Roche's Le Siècle des Lumières en province. These studies have tended to emphasize the conservative nature of the academies and their membership. The subject under discussion in these two chapters is less the Châlons Academy and its members than the essentially non-academic public who competed in their annual essay contests and the views contained in those essays.

were grossly inadequate; and, fourth, that the extent and magnitude of the problem required direct government intervention on a national scale to provide permanent relief programmes to alleviate the suffering of the absolutely indigent and fundamental structural reforms to control social and economic forces that condemned the majority of the labouring population to chronic poverty.

Unlike the philosophes or even the physiocrats, who consistently confused the results of poverty with its causes,¹³ these essayists had the experience and the ability to provide first-hand information about social, economic and political conditions at the local level and they advanced quite clear demographic, economic and institutional reasons for them. Moreover, unlike the existing and emerging elites who were championing laissez-faire social and economic policies and who seem to have regarded the economic dislocation of the poor as temporary, these essayists regarded the problem of the poor as permanent and increasing and advocated substantive measures to be undertaken by the Crown not only to provide short-term relief but also long-term structural reform to halt what they perceived to be the fearful economic polarization of their nation into rich and poor, propertied and unpropertied. Their essays on the begging and labouring poor give eloquent witness to the fact that large numbers of literate Frenchmen, early in the reign of Louis XVI, had accepted a reality that most public men long tried to ignore: that the problem of the poor was insoluble within the constraints of the existing social and economic order.

¹³ For an assessment of the philosophes' attitude toward the problem of poverty see especially Olwen Hufton, 'Towards an Understanding of the Poor of Eighteenth Century France', in French Government and Society, 1500-1850, edited by J.F. Bosher (London, Athlone Press, 1973), p. 164.

The picture of eighteenth-century France that these essayists advance is infinitely more complex than that we might draw from the descriptions given of it by the enlightened elite. Recent work by social, economic and demographic historians has documented the 'facts' of poverty and significantly altered our view of pre-revolutionary France and the prosperity and progress projected for it by the Old Regime's academic or armchair reformers. The France of Louis XVI uncovered by these historians is more in conformity with our notions of social, economic and political conditions in a pre-revolutionary society; but, for the most part these historians have been unable to link their analysis of the facts of poverty and their graphing of social and economic trends in this period with contemporary reaction to them by Frenchmen experiencing their effects and possessing the ability and motivation to write essays describing social and economic conditions at the local level. The Châlons essays provide this link while reminding us once again that poverty -- as much as prosperity -- is central to an understanding of the late Old Regime's social economy.

The discussion that follows is based on an analysis of the more than six thousand pages of manuscript essays written by this essentially unacademic literate public for competitions announced by the Châlons Academy for 1776-1777 and 1782-1783 on the plight of the nation's urban and rural, begging and labouring poor. The essayists' lack of literary and political sophistication and their inability to address themselves simply and directly to the academy's questions make their essays an extraordinary source of information about a whole range of issues not necessarily implied in the academy's wording of its contest questions. As an aged curé of Anjou wrote:

Je paroîtrai sans doute bien diffus mais je n'ai pas pu l'être moins. La matière semble exiger des détails. Les miens roulent surtout sur ce qui passe dans nos cantons. Je n'ai pas assez de

connaissance des autres pays pour [...] dire ce qui pourroit etre le plus analogue à leurs situations et aux moyens de les améliorer. Mais le fond du mal est cependant à peu près le même partout -- le fond de la misère des gens des campagnes.¹⁴

In these essays one finds the hopes and the grievances of a large and diverse sample of the pre-revolutionary literate public and discovers again and again their fear that the misery, the unrest and the hopelessness of labouring Frenchmen to which they were daily witness at the local level was an evil present throughout the country and threatening the nation as a whole.

The essays written by these unpractised authors are a tortured complex of 'petites digressions' which the essayists staunchly claimed had 'une connection médiate',¹⁵ with the Academy's questions but whose immediate connection is not always apparent without a careful contextual reading of the essay as a whole. Therefore, in attempting to quantify and compare the opinions and prejudices, the hopes and grievances of this multifarious group of Frenchmen from all three estates, I have tried to analyze both the casual and the considered opinions expressed in their essays.

An initial reading of the 152 manuscripts revealed a remarkable and totally unexpected consensus of opinion among them despite their widely divergent social, economic and geographic backgrounds. Further readings confirmed the impression of this consensus and prompted me to draw up grids to chart the direction and frequency of the essayists' opinions, because the critical consensus that was emerging from these essays was creating, more by accident than by design, a study in collective mentality. The manuscripts have now been read four times in all: the third and fourth

¹⁴ AD Marne I J 49, No. 43. Emphasis added.

¹⁵ AD Marne I J 42, No. 43.

readings checking and rechecking each of the essays for attitudes expressed (or not) on sixty-eight separate issues related to their analyses -- 'explanations' would perhaps be a better word -- of the causes of poverty and the reforms they advocate to relieve it. Tables III, IV, V and VI (see pp. 202, 267 - 269) summarize the results of this coding. In the survey that follows I will let the essayists themselves speak, offering their words to recreate a vision of the world as they saw it. Adding their voices to the far from silent figures that appear in the statistical tables will, I think, move us a step nearer to understanding how radical social and economic change was legitimized in the minds of provincial Frenchmen in the last decades of the Old Regime.

Summarized briefly -- and in the terminology of the modern economic historian -- the essayists' analyses of the causes of poverty and their suggestions as to the reforms necessary to relieve it were based upon their observation of the increasing imbalance between demand and supply in the economy's three primary markets -- labour, land and commodities. Viewing French society from the perspective of the labouring poor, the essayists recognized that the rapidly increasing labouring population was creating excessive supply in a competitive labour market, thus driving down wages and that at the same time it was driving prices up by increasing demand upon a relatively inelastic land and commodity market. Slightly more than four of every five essayists (81%) cite un- or under-employment as a primary factor in popular emiseration, while approximately half the essayists also specifically mention the human pressure upon a crowded land market (49%) and the inability of many within the labouring population to support transfer payments to Church, lord and Crown (55%) and still satisfy, without public assistance, their most basic needs at market prices

with the produce or income from their labours (48%). Indeed, as Table VI indicates, 92% of the Frenchmen writing for the Châlons contests judged -- at least on paper -- that the problems besetting France's labouring poor were of sufficient extent and magnitude to require positive royal initiative both to reform the social and institutional structure that had always favoured France's privileged land-rich elite at the expense of her land-poor labouring populace and also to reverse recent trends toward liberalization of the French economy that seemed to be reinforcing if not increasing the gulf between the very rich and the very poor. Considered quantitatively, the reforms mentioned by the Châlons essayists thus clearly indicate that a significant sample of the literate population reacted to the social, economic and demographic changes taking place in their society by advocating not less but more government intervention in the economic life of the nation. But a purely quantitative summary fails to capture the spirit of these essays which is much more convincingly conveyed by the essayists themselves as they describe the France they saw about them.

DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CAUSES OF POVERTY

Table III, which presents in summary form the causes of poverty most frequently cited by the Châlons essayists, adds nothing very new to our understanding of the social and economic facts of poverty. The research of twentieth-century social and economic historians has established the eighteenth-century's demographic growth, the rise in prices and rents, and the failure of wages to keep pace with them. Historians have also begun the difficult task of quantifying for the various regions of France the burden of the corvée and of the seignorial, ecclesiastical and royal dues and taxes. Other historians have exposed the insouciance of the physiocrat about the short-term victims of economic progress and the High

TABLE III
 ESSAYISTS' ASSESSMENT OF
 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO PUBLIC EMISERATION
 (presented in terms of frequency of citation & the essayists' social order)

ALL ESSAYISTS No. = 152 total No. citing factor	% of 152	FIRST ESTATE No. = 31 No. citing factor	% of 31	SECOND ESTATE No. = 21 No. citing factor	% of 21	THIRD ESTATE No. = 62 No. citing factor	% of 62	UNIDENTIFIED No. = 38 No. citing factor	% of 38
Un- or Under- Employment 123	81%	25	81%	16	76%	52	84%	30	79%
Inadequate provisions for 116 poor relief	76%	21	68%	19	90%	47	76%	29	76%
Burden of transfer pay- ments (in 84 money & kind, excluding rents)	55%	18	58%	11	52%	32	52%	23	61%
Existing land distribution 77 patterns	51%	14	45%	10	48%	31	50%	22	58%
Disparity between prices & wages 75	49%	16	52%	10	48%	31	50%	18	47%
Insufficient skills 62	41%	13	42%	8	38%	28	45%	13	34%
Laziness 13	9%	3	10%	2	10%	4	6%	4	11%
No mention 8	5%	2	6%	1	5%	3	5%	2	5%

Enlightenment's disinclination to consider any cause of poverty that might intrude upon their own prejudices or position. However, the astounding revelation which emerges from a careful reading and analysis of the essays written by the Châlons competitors is that this primarily economic conceptualization of the causes of large-scale poverty was not written by those benefiting from the hindsight of history but by those contemporary to the crisis. Writing without benefit of systematic data or a comparative framework and at a time when those who called themselves 'économistes' focused on prosperity and progress and the long-term benefits to be procured by a rationalization of cultivation and marketing, these unpractised publicists sketch out in fairly accurate detail an anatomy of the economic and social crisis that threatened the body politic struggling for existence in the last years of the Old Regime.

The Châlons essays are a collection of eyewitness accounts, by people from all over France, of what they perceived to be the deteriorating economic situation of the majority of Frenchmen within the span of their own lifetime and recent memory. They give living testimony to the increase in population and prices and the decline in real wages that have forced subsequent historians to recognize in eighteenth-century France the paradox of widespread poverty in the midst of unprecedented prosperity. The Châlons essayists recognized this paradox and asserted that the same social, economic and demographic forces that operated for the benefit of those within the possessing classes, able to exploit the inflated labouring population and the prices they paid to rent land and buy bread, also operated to the detriment of the vast majority in the labouring classes. For those hurt by the conjuncture of these forces there was, in the view of these essayists, little hope of fulfilling the academy's optimistic aim

of ameliorating their situation if the Crown did not step in with radical reform to halt the polarization of society into rich and poor. Royal intervention in the economic life of both rich and poor was thus the most fundamental element in these essayists' programme of reforms. But to give credence to their arguments and urgency to their appeal for reform the essayists first described the stages through which they had seen so many families pass in their descent from economic dependence to bare subsistence, from marginality to despair.

As told by the Châlons essayists, the deterioration of family economies followed one of two basic and often overlapping patterns -- that of the peasant family working to feed themselves and pay lord and Crown from the fruits of their agricultural labour and that of the family without enough land to be self-sufficient and forced to rely principally upon wage labour to stay above destitution. Both were subject in different ways to the economic crises of the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI and, though the plight of the wage labourer was clearly more serious, both were destined to experience a further deterioration in their economic situation if current trends went unchecked. We will first explore the essayists' description of the dilemma facing the subsistence farmer in the seventies and early eighties and then follow it with that of the agricultural or industrial wage labourer.

Central to the dilemma of both the subsistence farmer and the wage labourer was the problem posed to individual families and local economies by the dramatic increase in population within the span of the essayists' lifetime. It has been estimated that at the beginning of Louis XVI's reign 42.6% of all Frenchmen were under twenty years of age with another 30.9%

in their thirties.¹⁶ Even if population levels and density in these decades never surpassed the highest levels in the seventeenth century, as the research of Michel Morineau would indicate,¹⁷ the mounting pressure upon the rural economy made by the most recent surge in demographic growth from the 1730s and 1740s onward would seem to have made a profound impression upon those who, like the Châlons essayists, could remember when there had been much less pressure on the land and labour markets and therefore less obvious economic hardship for the labouring classes.¹⁸ In their private correspondence with the Crown, the royal intendants expressed their concern that France had 'trop de Peuples',¹⁹ -- a view confirmed by essayists who, like them, perceived a growing imbalance between population and resources. Again and again the essayists express their conviction that France was becoming crowded with 'une foule d'hommes de trop [...] cette

¹⁶ Marcel Reinhard, Histoire de la population mondiale de 1700 à 1748 (Paris, Montchrestian, 1949), p. 62. The generality of Châlons provides an apt illustration of rapid acceleration in population in the quarter century preceding Louis XVI's accession to the throne; it experienced its most intensive population growth for all the eighteenth century between 1750 and 1778. Michel Morineau, Les Faux-semblants d'un démarrage économique (Paris, Armand Colin, 1971), p. 304. Since poor soil and lack of important industrial centres (apart from the textile manufacturing towns of Reims and Troyes) prompted emigration away from Champagne throughout this period, one could perhaps conclude that the rise in population during these decades was indeed due in large measure to natural increase.

¹⁷ Morineau, Les Faux-semblants, p. 322.

¹⁸ For further discussion of the role of demographic growth in the emiseration of generations born since 1730 see Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, L'Age classique des paysans, 1340-1789, Vol. II of Histoire de la France rurale, edited by Georges Duby and Armand Walloon (Paris, Seuil, 1975), pp. 438-40.

¹⁹ François de Dainville, 'Un dénombrement inédit au XVIIIe siècle: L'enquête de Cointroleur général Orry - 1745', Population, 7 (jan-mars 1952), 56.

foule des malheureux [...] dont le nombre semble s'accroître tous les jours'.²⁰

Consciously contradicting what they regarded as 'une des opinions le[s] plus reçu[es]',²¹ among those who styled themselves the champions of national prosperity, the Châlons essayists maintain that France was not suffering from a decline in population but rather from excessive population growth or, at least, its maldistribution between economic regions. Thus, although an essayist like the judge Barbe de la Barthe of the Cour des aides et finances of Guyenne might concede that 'on sera sans doute étonné que je m'élève contre cette surabondance de population dans un temps où de toute parte on crie à la dépopulation', he would nevertheless maintain that if one looked beyond the urban elites to the labouring poor of town and country, one would be forced to recognize that 'relativement à la classe des citoyens dont les moyens de subsistance sont précaires et incertaines', there was indisputable evidence 'de la trop grande population'.²²

SITUATION OF THE SMALL PEASANT PROPRIETOR

The effect of this demographic growth on the small proprietor or tenant farmer was critical to the essayists' understanding and explanation of the

²⁰ AD Marne I J 39 No. 46. The author of this comment was a young noble, M. de Chateaufieux, who described himself as 'jeune, sans experience' and gave his address as 'chez Mr Beauregard ... à St Cloud'.

²¹ AD Marne I J 40, No. 68. 'Une des opinions le plus reçu est que la richesse d'un Etat augmente en raison de la population: cela peut-être dans les pays où le trafic des hommes est établi, mais partout où cette usage n'est pas encore parvenu, je croirois que le nombre d'habitans devroit être proportionné à la fertilité du territoire. Toutes les fois qu'il excédera, le surplus ne pourra vivre qu'avec peine et à force d'industrie: or cest la terre qui doit nourrir les hommes et non l'industrie parce qu'alors ceux qui ne'n auroient pas seroient obligés de mourir de faim.'

²² AD Marne I J 41, No. 87.

suffering they were presently witnessing among those who had once been self-sufficient. The comments of François Trioson and Clicquot de Blervache are typical of those articulated by the essayists and sum up their perception of the smallholder's predicament when faced with the burden of more children than his land could easily support. 'Ayant beaucoup d'enfants, tous incapables de travailler, son unique inquiétude consiste à les nourrir.'²³ 'Il voit en gémissant croître autour de lui des enfants dont la nourriture et l'entretien vont augmenter le poids de ses peines, des enfants pour lesquels il n'aperçoit dans l'avenir que le sort malheureux auquel il est condamné.'²⁴

The birth of these children spelled disaster for the peasant smallholder not only because it temporarily reduced the agricultural work that his wife -- an essential member of the family workforce -- could

²³ AD Marne I J 49 No. 19. François Trioson was a doctor at Chaise Dieu in Auvergne, a poor, underdeveloped province that experienced demographic growth of between 40-50% between 1729 and 1789. Large numbers of Auvergnats emigrated to Paris and the northern towns for up to nine months of the year in order to supplement the family income with wages earned outside the province. For those of the generations born after 1730 who remained at home, smallholdings were 'pulverized' into tiny parcels too small to produce a subsistence living for their owners. Abel Pointrineau, La Vie rurale en basse Auvergne au XVIII^e siècle (Paris, PUF, 1965).

²⁴ Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420. Clicquot de Blervache, native of Reims, was one of five national Inspectors general of Commerce. For similar statements about the burden young and large families represented for the peasant family see in particular AD Marne I J 38 No. 11; I J 40 Nos. 60 and 62 and I J 42 Nos. 110 and 113. When enumerating the familial claims upon the peasant householder's income, the Châlons essayists were also careful to mention the burden upon fragile family economies of aged or invalid parents. Mme Eglain of Paris voices the concern, common in the essays, about the 'infinité des vieux et vieilles à charge à leurs familles'. AD Marne I J 39 No. 27. As we shall see, 64% of the competitors specifically advocated public assistance to meet at least some of the needs of the young, old or invalid, whose families were unable to care for them. The percentage rises still further if we include with that figure the 30% who advocate supplements of money or food to those families unable to care unassisted for all their family members.

perform²⁵ and increased the number of mouths the family had to feed but also because a large family eventually meant that if by some good fortune the peasant during his lifetime had sufficient property to provide for his and his family's needs, equal division of that property among the children at his death left each of them in their turn with parcels of land inadequate to meet the needs of their families. The lawyer Millot, commenting on the size of peasant holdings in the region surrounding his village of Fulvy (in the future département of the Yonne), described a phenomenon that historians have confirmed was indeed occurring throughout those regions in France where population had grown most intensely. Millot observed that the increasing peasant population had led to 'la division et subdivision presque à l'infini des corps d'héritages' and added, 'il est bien rare de les voir en pièces un peu considérables. Ce ne sont le plus communément que des pièces d'un arpent, d'un journal, d'un demi journal [...] d'un tiers, d'un quart, d'un demi quart [...] et autres fractions pareilles'.²⁶

Thus, even though peasants without any land still might be a minority in the France of the seventies and eighties, observation of the effects of

²⁵ AD Marne I J 41 No. 78, Roussel de la Berardiére, professor of French law at the university of Caen. A comment by his fellow essayist, the Versailles choirmaster Rabigot Delacroix, illustrates both his awareness of their problem and his disgust for all those (the regular clergy included) whose moralistic platitudes about the prolific poor ignored their obvious need. Recounting an exchange between a monk and a poor woman who begs of him bread for her children, Rabigot has the monk reply: 'Vous avez eu le plaisir de faire vos enfans; ce n'est pas moi qui les a faits; ainsi arrangez-vous comme vous voudrez pour les nourrir.' AD Marne I J 39 No. 29.

²⁶ AD Marne I J 49 No. 9. For a discussion of inheritance laws and their effect on peasant property see: Philippe Sagnac, 'L'Agriculture et les classes rurales en France au XVIII^e siècle', Revue de synthèse historiques, 12.2 (avril 1906), 149-51; H.V. Slicher van Bath, The Agrarian History of Western Europe AD 500-1850 (London, Arnold, 1963), p. 321; and 'Agriculture in the Vital Revolution', chapter 2, Vol. V of the Cambridge Economic History of Europe, edited by E.E. Rich and C.H. Wilson (London, Cambridge University Press, 1977), 113.

rapidly increasing rural population on the size and distribution of peasant holdings had convinced 51% of those competing in the Châlons contests that a significant majority of subsistence farmers was without sufficient land to feed their families and acquit the sums they owed to the Church, the territorial seigneur and the Crown.

Fifty-five percent of the essayists pointed to the burden of transfer payments as another major factor contributing to the deteriorating economic situation of the small peasant proprietor or tenant farmer. Whether he farmed his own land or leased it from a non-resident proprietor, the peasant cultivator was forced to bear a heavy burden of transfer payments collected on his gross product. Transfer payments in the form of direct taxes, the dîme and seigneurial dues (apart from the cens) claimed up to half of his produce even before he had deducted his costs in grain, agricultural labour, rents (if he held the land in tenure) or laid aside enough food to feed his family.

The essayists were most critical of the charges -- dues exacted in money and kind -- made by territorial seigneurs of all three estates. The Châlons essayists maintained that the effective and the real burden of transfer payments from the peasant to these territorial seigneurs was increasing because the latter were both exploiting their land more systematically -- 'on choisit les régisseurs les plus intelligents [...] qui traittent sévèrement les censitaires [...] et se font paier plus exactement',²⁷ -- and, in the view of many of the essayists, more cruelly through 'agens qui pour faire leur cour aux seigneurs, gentilshommes et

²⁷ AD Marne I J 41 No. 97.

bourgeois traitent les laboureurs, journaliers, hommes de peine et leurs femmes et leurs enfants comme des esclaves'.²⁸

Farm agents, working with hired feudistes, were also reviving old dues -- dues which, in the words of the aged priest Bouquet, 'les seigneurs territoriaux se sont arrogés depuis peu' and which, he claimed, 'ne [sont] écrit[s] du moins que je connoisse dans aucun arrêt ni jurisconsulte coutume'. Although Bouquet had himself spent most of his working life as a priest and missionary to the islands of St Pierre-et-Miquelon in North America, he explained to the Academy that his grandfather had been a laboureur in Brittany and so, when it was time that he, the priest, returned to France, he had returned to live in Brittany and was now offering the Châlons Academy what he described as 'ma façon de penser relativement à la Bretagne que j'habite, ne connoissant pas les coutumes des autres provinces'. Limited though his perspective might be, it was, he assured them, rooted in a life and countryside he knew personally.²⁹ But, confirmation of the revival of dormant dues in other regions came from other essayists. Another priest, this time working in the diocese of Soissons, the curé Gaillard, wrote saying that privileged land owners were using similar means in and around his village to 'extorque[r] ... les droits souvent injustes (parce qu'ils sont nouveaux et presque toujours douteux)' and to augment their holdings either directly through 'droits de

²⁸ AD Marne I J 49 No. 4, Honoré Fabre from St Roche en Riveneuve. Fabre's comments are by no means exceptional. For typical unmeasured criticism of the practices of the agents of non-resident seigneurs see the essay by the Franciscan Collin from Saintes (Charente Maritime): 'Quand un seigneur, loin de résider, confie au contraire ses domaines ou à de cruels régisseurs qui immolent et qui tuent, ou bien encore à des fermiers tyranniques qui dessèchent le sang du pauvre et se repaissent pour ainsi dire de sa chair [...] non seulement il ne fait pas pour lors du bien, mais encore ses meurtriers agents font du mal en son nom.' AD Marne I J 50 No. 2.

²⁹ AD Marne I J 49 No. 21. Bouquet's four-page 'essay' was sent from Pleneuf near Lamballe (Côtes-du-Nord).

trriage [pour] dépouiller impitoyablement [...] les vassaux de leurs communes',³⁰ or directly through the droit de clameur or retrait féodal whereby the seigneur, whenever a plot changed hands, either demanded a transfer fee which poor peasants could not pay or himself took the place of the buyer. In both cases, an essayist from Champagne remarked, 'les seigneurs de paroisse, avec leurs droits de clameur sur toutes les terres qui dépendent de leur fief, font que le petit peuple ne peut faire l'acquisition de plus petit angle de terre'.³¹

The aged laboureur Gaillot, writing from St Jean sur Tourbe, termed these practices 'la dernière guerre et la plus violente contre les labourers' and gave example after example, citing names of specific seigneurs in Champagne, 'qui ont par subtilité augmenté leurs droits, y ajoutant la chicane' to demand increased percentages for the champart and for the sale of grain and wool brought to local markets. Citing his own observation, over the years, of the rise in market taxes Gaillot asserted: 'j'ai été au marché il y a 50 ans on ne payoit rien' and then concluded, rather ominously, 'si les villages étoient entendus sur les droits seigneuriaux [...] on connoîtroit la fraude'.³² In general, the Châlons essayists' criticism was not directed against a 'feudal reaction' per se but rather against the practices of territorial seigneurs from all three estates -- 'tout les puissants en richesses' -- who were resurrecting

³⁰ AD Marne I J 41 No. 90. Gaillard's village was near Neuilli St Front in the diocese of Soissons.

³¹ Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 863. On the subject of this transfer fee Bouquet remarked in disgust, 'tout le monde n'est pas garni d'argent; par conséquent les droits sur les échanges et contre échange sont [...] pour les uns impossibles et pour les autres ruineux'. AD Marne I J 49 No. 21.

³² AD Marne I J 49 No. 30.

moribund obligations attached to their land in order to extract increased dues from peasant tenants.³³

The essayists are equally critical of the upper and regular clergy whose harshness toward their tenants as ecclesiastical seigneurs seemed especially cruel to peasants who had been told to regard the Church and churchmen as defenders of the poor but who found, in reality, that as landlords ecclesiastics 'afferment mieux que les laïcs'.³⁴ Moreover, the ecclesiastical dîme, like the seigneurial champart, levied in kind upon the gross product of the tenant's labours, also represented 'une charge toute à fait onéreuse' which was made more grievous still because the dîme was often enfeoffed or laicized to 'décimateurs étrangers', whom a priest among the essayists noted, 'ne font pour la plupart aucun bien dans les paroisses dont ils tirent la quintessence'.³⁵ As a result the dîme had become just

³³ AD Marne I J 49 No. 37. For further discussion of the eighteenth-century's seigneurial reaction see Histoire économique et sociale de la France, edited by Fernand Braudel and Ernest Labrousse (Paris, PUF, 1970), volume II: Des derniers temps de l'âge seigneurial aux préludes de l'âge industriel (1660-1789), p. 470. For an excellent description of the use of feudistes by the enterprising Count of Saulx-Tavanes see Robert Forster, 'The Burgundian Estate at the End of the Old Regime', chapter II of The House of Saulx-Tavanes, pp. 55-108.

³⁴ AD Marne I J 41 No. 97. See also AD Marne I J 39 Nos. 25 and 29; I J 41 No. 98 and I J 40 Nos 7 and 33. The as yet unidentified author of the essay catalogued I J 41 No. 97 was scathing in his criticism of the ecclesiastical landlords of the great religious houses: 'Ils ne peuvent dire qu'ils laissent leurs fermiers en état de distribuer les aumônes [...]. Les supérieurs de ces maisons se croient dans le droit de frayer avec les seigneurs de la plus haute naissance tandis qu'ils doivent être tout occupés de la prière et de la distribution de leurs revenus aux pauvres.'

³⁵ AD Marne I J 49 No. 43. An unidentified competitor in the contest of 1782 seems to regard the enfeoffed dîme (which rose proportionally with the rising market value of the produce which the dîme holder collected for it) as a kind of 'new' due, of human not divine origin, and as dubious as the 'old' dues being claimed by lay seigneurs; and so, while still professing himself a believing Catholic (internal evidence in his essay would seem to indicate that he was, in fact, a member of the lower clergy) protested: 'je declare par avance que je fais profession de la religion catholique et romaine; que je suis résolu moyennant la grâce de Dieu de vivre et mourir comme mes ancêtres dans cette créance' [but] 'pour peu

another kind of financial burden and one which had lost whatever justification it had had originally. Furthermore, this same pressured priest noted sadly, it provoked hostility toward the Church and diluted, if not destroyed, whatever good the local priest might do in his parish. 'La dixme ne se paye presque aujourd'huy partout qu'à contre coeur, cause mille chicanes, et en couvrant les pasteurs de l'odieux vernis d'intérêt, leur fait perdre la confiance de leurs paroissiens [...]'.³⁶ For this priest of thirty-two years, when it came to the impositions being levied on his parishioners, not just sums but souls were at stake.

The Châlons essayists' discussion of those who paid and those who received transfer payments revealed a common and economically-determined conviction that the main articulation in Old Regime society was not that between estates but rather between those who owned great property and enjoyed its fruits and those who worked the land and generated its produce. For this reason those writing for the Châlons contests frequently grouped together transfer payments made to the Church with those made to the Crown and to the seigneurial landlords of all three estates. For the peasants forced to make these payments in money and kind, the social status of the recipients mattered less than the economic reality, because no matter who was asking for the money or produce, the cumulative effect of these dues was to drive the small producer below subsistence. Whether the sum demanded was called the dîme, the champart, the corvée or the taille, the

qu'on soit instruit personne n'ignore que la dixme dans la loi nouvelle n'est pas de droit divin'. AD Marne I J 49 No. 33.

³⁶ Ibid.

peasant was -- as one essayist remarked ruefully -- 'contraint de les payer'.³⁷

Yet from their severe criticism of the dîme and champart and other exactions made by Church and seigneur, the essayists exempted royal taxes neither questioning their necessity nor their justification. Most agreed with the Crown official who wrote that 'la masse des impositions royales levées sur la nation ont un motif légitime, sçavoir l'administration et la défense de l'Etat'.³⁸ But they did complain that although royal taxes were not insupportable in themselves, they were made odious to the people by the arbitrariness of their assessment, the abuses of privilege, and the vicious form of their perception.³⁹ More than half the essayists expressed open criticism of royal fiscal policy for placing the bulk of the direct tax burden on those least able to pay. 'Dans les pays d'élection', a lower clergyman from just such a region lamented, 'l'injuste répartition de la taille contribue beaucoup à la misère publique, dont le faix tombe

³⁷ AD Marne I J 41 No. 98. Edward A. Allen offers an example of the conflation in the minds of eighteenth-century peasants of dues owed to Church and State. Allen cites the case of Languedoc farmers and landowners who refused to pay the dîme on land they had newly cleared, claiming with some justification that the tax exemptions promised by a royal edict of 1770 on newly de-forested land applied to all taxes, including the hated tithes. See Allen, 'Deforestation and Fuel Crisis in Pre-revolutionary Languedoc, 1720-1789', French Historical Studies, 13.4 (Fall 1984), 455-473 (p. 464).

³⁸ Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420. This same essayist reckoned that 'la masse totale des droits féodaux, des dixmes seigneuriales et ecclésiastiques excède ou égale au moins la masse des impositions royales'.

³⁹ Clicquot de Blervache provides ones of the most vivid descriptions of the rapaciousness of tax collectors: 'Aucune loi sans doute n'autorise cet infâme trafic des vexations. Vouons donc à l'indignation public ces vampires impitoyables qui sucent dans l'obscurité le plus pur sang du Peuple. Je les dénonce à votre justice, magistrats administrateurs des provinces. Poursuivez-les dans une sainte colère. Levez le voile ténébreux qui couvre ces mystères d'iniquités'. Ibid.

sur les plus pauvres habitants'.⁴⁰ To understand just what taxes cost the people, these writers insisted, those far from the countryside who dispassionately levied huge sums on the peasants should come to the villages and hamlets to witness the suffering they entailed: 'il faut voir de près l'effet des impôts pour en sentir tout le poids'.⁴¹ The perspective of popular suffering which most of these writers shared was one which they hoped by their Châlons essays to offer to those in power.

The essayists registered many grievances against the arbitrariness and the inequity of the taille; but essayists like the laboureur Fequant also complained that they were having difficulty in paying the new vingtièmes and heavier indirect taxes on commodities of general consumption as well. 'On sçait [que] les impositions accessoires augmentent tous les ans: les vingtièmes, le sel si utile à l'agriculture, ainsi que les cuirs et le tabac sont aussi augmentés'.⁴² The farmers among the essayists were especially critical of the gabelle and the tax farmers who collected it. The laboureur Gaillot railed against 'toute l'inhumanité de la gabelle et des commis', who patrolled the country, arresting smugglers and then putting poor peasants to ruinous trial. 'Si on pouvoit expliquer tous les torts injustes que cette harpie cause aux laboureurs et aux commerce on ne

⁴⁰ AD Marne I J 49 No. 33. For further criticism of the inequity and the burden of the taille see in particular I J 42, No. 113, written by one of those awarded fourth honorable mention by the academy for his essay on the beggar, Romans de Coppier.

⁴¹ AD Marne I J 41 No. 97.

⁴² AD Marne I J 49 No. 23. Fequant is from Champagne. It was estimated by the Assembly of the Election of Châlons in 1787 that between 1760 and 1780 the brevet général in Champagne rose between one-third and one-half. Procès-verbal des séances de l'Assemblée de L'Election de Châlons en Champagne, tenue au mois d'août 1787. (Châlons, Seneuze, 1788).

finiroit pas.'⁴³ Gaillot also contended that the price of salt had risen by more than one-third within the last forty years and complained that during the same period the taille and the capitation together had nearly doubled for his village even though 'le village n'a pas quatre feux de plus'.⁴⁴

Gaillot's contention that taxes were rising without a comparable increase in the number of taxpayers was confirmed by the royal official Clicquot de Blervache. An officer of the central government, Clicquot was nevertheless extremely critical of the system of financing of state expenditure through extensive borrowing and the sale of privileged offices that carried exemption from taxes. He, too, confirmed that in France taxes were growing at the same time that the tax base was shrinking. 'Quel déluge de maux ce fatal système n'a-t-il pas versé sur la France depuis un siècle. Les emprunts ont multiplié les privilèges et les exemptions'; and 'ce qu'il y a de plus contradictoire, ils ont augmenté les impôts et diminué en même temps le nombre de contribuables'.⁴⁵ Fifty-five percent of the essayists, not simply the farmers and bureaucrats whose comments have been cited, condemned the policy and practice of royal taxation and cited them as primary factors in the process whereby small farmers were forced below self-sufficiency.

⁴³ AD Marne I J 49 No. 30. The essayists maintained that the burden of the gabelle was almost as heavy as the taille for the small cultivator and that, although the gabelle was an indirect tax on consumption, it was doubly onerous because it taxed a dietary necessity. An essayist living in the Ile de France, one of the twelve provinces included in the heavily taxed pays de grande gabelle, complained bitterly about this tax which exploited the fact that salt was the 'd'anree [denrée] de première nécessité après le pain pour toute l'humanité et qui souvent n'ont que les légumes et des racines à manger'. AD Marne I J 49 No. 3. This essayist identified himself as 'un citoyen demeurant non loing de Pont Ste. Maxence' (which was near Senlis in the future département of the Oise).

⁴⁴ AD Marne I J 49 No. 30.

⁴⁵ Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420.

Even if the abuses involved in the assessment and collection of the dues owed to the Church, the Crown and the territorial seigneurs were ignored, the essayists maintained that simple arithmetic would demonstrate that the combined effect of these impositions pushed the majority of smallholders below self-sufficiency. The property they owned was often simply too small to allow them to feed their families and pay everyone who claimed a share in their harvest. 'Il ne faut que considérer le nombre des copropriétaires qui viennent partager le fruits de leurs travaux', began an essayist from Reims, to see why so many peasant proprietors were finding it increasingly difficult to maintain themselves, their property and all these transfer payments.

A peine ont les laboureurs et les habitants des campagnes obtenu la permission de vendanger leurs vignes ou de moissonner leurs champs, que le bailleur, le seigneur du fief, le seigneur suzerain, le décimateur, le Pasteur, &c., &c., réclament leur partage dans la récolte. Viennent ensuite les collecteurs des droits royaux, exiger la taille, l'industrie, la capitation, les vingtièmes, sans compter la gabelle, la tabac, les aides, &c., &c. De toutes ces levées successives faites sur le produit des sueurs de l'infortuné cultivateur, il résulte que de douze gerbes que son industrie a fait naître, il ne lui reste qu'une pour sa subsistance.⁴⁶

The essayists' estimates of the cultivator's net product from his labours varied between a tenth and a twelfth. One who set the figure at a tenth remarked bitterly that the sums the cultivator was required to pay to those above him effectively reduced the small proprietor to the status of wage labourer for the non-resident proprietor.

Nos prétendus propriétaires ne sont en effet que de simples engagistes des décimateurs et des seigneurs sur qui réside la vraie propriété foncière. Ces propriétaires ont à peine un dixième de la récolte, si l'on déduit la dixme, les droits seigneuriaux, qu'entraîne la propriété, les semences, les frais de labour,

⁴⁶ Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 1275. A report made by the new assembly of Haute Guyenne in October of 1780 confirmed this one in twelve figure (Délibérations de l'Assemblée de Haute Guyenne).

d'engrais, de répartition, d'achat et entretien des bestiaux, les tailles et le partage avec le colon.⁴⁷

To the honest peasant it undoubtedly seemed, this same essayist wrote, that 'mille institutions politiques envahiss[ent] le fruit du travail du cultivateur'.⁴⁸ Helpless before the demands of privileged co-proprietors, 'les laboureurs', declared an essayist from Beauvais, 'sont entièrement découragés'. Indeed, he continued, laboureurs who a century earlier were said to have enjoyed some degree of economic security 'ne voyent pas de fin, ni de soulagement à leur triste situation'.⁴⁹

Citing thirty years experience living and travelling around the countryside, this essayist insisted that the economic deterioration and discouragement he had witnessed among cultivators in the Beauvais was not an isolated phenomenon:

Je vous diray seulement, Messieurs, que les laboureurs sont entièrement découragés [...]. Ce sont là les observations que je fais journellement depuis plus de trente ans que j'habite et parcouru les campagnes. Toutes les provinces que [j'ay] parcourues j'ay trouvé partout les même découragement. Il n'y a que le plus ou le moins.⁵⁰

Although this was not the case for 'des fermiers de terres seigneurielles' who, according to this same essayist, 'ont fait de grosses fortunes dans les tems où le peuple mourait de faim', it could reasonably be said to be the predicament 'des laboureurs en général -- c'est à dire de tous les habitants de la campagne qui ont chacun quelques journaux ou arpens de terre

⁴⁷ AD Marne I J 41 No. 98. Emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ AD Marne I J 49 No. 41. The essayist is the hobereau comte de Saint Belin from Clermont in Beauvais.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

en propriété. La situation de ceux cy', he insisted, 'est déplorable'.⁵¹ The sums required of the laboureurs were so enormous that even they were forced to lead a hopeless hand-to-mouth existence, one step ahead -- and that not always -- of their creditors. 'Il n'est point de petits cultivateurs qui ne soient forcés de vendre immédiatement après les récoltes, et même quelque fois d'avance, les denrées les plus précieuses et de première nécessité pour satisfaire aux charges multipliées.' Their creditors paid, 'il ne leur reste des fruits de leurs travaux que ce que la terre peut produire de plus abject.'⁵² Thus, those whose land and labour had produced the nation's marketable grain were forced soon after their harvest to 'rachet[r] à un haut prix ce qu'ils ont vendu eux-mêmes à bas prix'.⁵³

⁵¹ AD Marne I J 49 No. 41. Pierre Goubert, in his invaluable Cent mille provinciaux au XVII^e siècle: Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1750, was careful to insist upon the obvious economic superiority of the laboureur in seventeenth-century Beauvais. The testimony of these essayists therefore offers evidence that by the late eighteenth century both the formerly distinct social status and terminology and the economic security of the laboureur were slipping. See Goubert, Cent mille provinciaux (Paris, Flammarion, 1968), pp. 191-217.

That the distinction between laboureur and journalier was no longer clear in Brittany was confirmed by the Breton Jean-Jacques Bouquet who in his essay so confounded the terms that it becomes evident that in that pays de petite culture, where peasant proprietors held no more than 20% of the land, the so-called laboureur was as dependent for his survival on finding outside work as was the journalier. Bouquet wrote of the Breton peasantry: 'il est certain que la classe des hommes la plus nécessaire est celle qui nourrit les autres. C'est celle des laboureurs. C'est cependant ordinairement la plus pauvre et la plus misérable particulièrement celle des journaliers parce qu'elle est la moins salarisée et la plus méprisée et demeura toujours celle des malheureux jusqu'à qu'on ne la rende plus précieuse et à même de faire sentir combien elle est nécessaire'. AD Marne I J 49 No. 21.

⁵² AD Marne I J 49 No. 41.

⁵³ AD Marne I J 49 No. 17. The author of this statement is Pierre-François Pauvert who was curé of Rochemenier near Doue in Anjou from 1763 until his death in 1789. I am grateful to M R. Perrin de Rouvray of the Maison de Santé médicale Saint Sauveur de l'Esvière, Anjou, for information about Pauvert's life. See John McManners, French Ecclesiastical Society under the Ancien Regime: A Study of Angers in the Eighteenth Century (University of Manchester Press, 1960), p. 188, for further information

Estimates vary between regions -- and historians -- about the amount of land exploited directly by peasant proprietors in the decades preceding the revolution; but even the most optimistic estimates indicate that at least 85% of French peasant families did not own sufficient land to produce -- or purchase from the profit of industrial crops -- enough to supply their most basic needs and acquit obligations in money and kind.⁵⁴ In order to supplement their income, maintain their hold on property and their status as small farmers, cultivators leased land, borrowing to pay money rents, or entered into a sharecropping tenancy. In the first instance, the peasant who leased land directly faced rent prices that by region doubled or even tripled over the last five decades of the Old Regime -- with the largest increases of all coming in the decade 1765-1775.⁵⁵ But sharecropping was by far the most widespread system of peasant tenure and the obvious solution for the peasant without capital to rent land or against which to borrow money.⁵⁶ Under either form of tenancy, demand for leases was so great by the reign of Louis XVI that even when the sums promised in the lease agreement exceeded the price of grain that the land

about Pauvert.

⁵⁴ In the eighteenth century the peasant family needed an estimated 12-27 hectares (30 to 65 acres) to be economically independent. Professor Labrousse indicated that as late as 1855, 85% of the peasantry owned farms of less than 10 hectares (25 acres) and stated that in the eighteenth century the percentage of economically-dependent peasants was even higher. E. Labrousse, 'The Evolution of Peasant Society in France from the Eighteenth Century to the Present', in French Society and Culture since the Old Regime, edited by E. Acomb and M. Brown (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 60.

⁵⁵ Braudel and Labrousse, eds, Histoire économique et sociale de la France, II, 455-56.

⁵⁶ Ibid., II, 142. Loutchisky estimated that métayage with payment typically in kind and not money was the practice in seven-eighths of France. J. Loutchisky, L'Etat des classes agricoles en France à la veille de la Révolution (Paris, Honoré Champion, 1911), pp. 75-78.

could produce, proprietors still found peasants willing to risk everything to rent their land.⁵⁷ As an essayist from Guyenne remarked:

Lorsqu'un propriétaire les appelle pour cultiver son bien, on parle des conventions. Les parties paroissent traiter d'égal à égal mais il n'en est rien: le paysan pressé par la faim soumet sa tête au joug qu'on lui impose. Cependant la portion stipulée est insuffisante pour nourrir la famille agricole.⁵⁸

Thus, even the peasant who managed to rent land to farm had little hope of improving his family's fortunes. If he were a sharecropper, the proprietor claimed from a third to a half of his produce as rent even before the peasant could count costs and pay other obligations and 'parce que son gain se borne' to what a laboureur essayist called 'la vie animale', the tenant without capital was 'né pauvre et condamné à rester pauvre et méprisé'.⁵⁹ This was a view borne of personal knowledge for the writer of this statement had himself worked the land for twenty-four years and knew too well the downward spiral of those whose task it was to till France's soil. 'Tristement courbé vers la terre qu'il ne [...] cultive qu'à regret parce qu'il moissonnera pour autrui', the tenant in a crowded land market,

⁵⁷ C.E. Labrousse, Crisis in the French Economy, p. 65. Loutchisky noted that this phenomenon was particularly marked in the north. In that region, for example, land that was rented for 475 livres in 1747 rented at 1000 livres in 1774. And the cost of renting land compared to the market price of grain accelerated even more rapidly in the last quarter century before the revolution. A sharecropping tenancy that was leased in 1776 in Brittany for 200 livres commanded 350 livres three years later. When payment was in money and grain, the augmentation in grain was comparable.

A propos of the rise in rent prices and its effect on the cultivator during this period a Breton subdélégué wrote: 'Si les seigneurs ne haussaient pas continuellement le prix de leurs fermages, et ne faisaient pas en cela tort aux paysans, s'ils ne leur enlevaient pas la possibilité d'augmenter leurs têtes de bétail, d'acquérir plus de terres louables et de contribuer d'avantage à la richesse de la localité. Malheureusement, les seigneurs ne songent qu'à eux et à leurs plaisirs et non au véritable bien-être, et aux avantages qui pourraient résulter d'une amélioration du sort de ces pauvres agriculteurs, de ces journaliers misérables'. Quoted by Loutchisky, L'État des classes agricoles, p. 100.

⁵⁸ AD Marne I J 41 No. 87.

⁵⁹ AD Marne I J 49 No. 42.

according to yet another essayist, had no real hope of digging himself out of debt. 'Peu éclairés ou trop peu conséquents', land-hungry peasants agreed to lease terms 'à des gros prix et avec pot-de-vin des baux de trois, six et neuf ans dont quelques fois', a Parisian essayist added, 'ils ne jouissent même pas du fruit de la première récolte'.⁶⁰ Desperate and depending entirely 'sur sa santé, sur l'humanité de son maître [et] sur l'abondance des récoltes', the tenant agreed to terms which with ill health, ill will or a bad harvest might actually result in an acceleration of the downward momentum of his family towards further indebtedness and the loss of both the tenancy and their own meagre belongings.

Debt was the great enemy of the tenant farmer and yet, as Professor Hufton has noted, the peasant could not live without going into debt and the only loans he could get jeopardized his livelihood still more.⁶¹ The Châlons essayists offered contemporary testimony about the means and ends of peasant indebtedness and traced the process whereby a tenant farmer moved from economic dependence to increasing indebtedness and ultimately to expulsion from his tenancy. If the peasant fell behind in paying his taxes or his rent, a laboureur wrote, he normally 'a recours à son maître qui lui prête pour vivre lui et sa famille',⁶² and, yet, added an essayist who was registered as a lawyer at the parlement of Nancy, 'le cultivateur avec le faible produit ne peut subsister et s'acquitter tout à la fois:

⁶⁰ AD Marne I J 49 No. 20. The essay is signed 'G.L. d'E, Paris'. Robert Forster found that in contrast to English practice, where rents usually were not raised for the same tenant and the same tenant family might remain on the land for generations, in France rents rose within the terms of the lease and leases were often not renewed, leading to a rapid turnover of leases on most estates. Forster, 'Obstacles to Agricultural Growth in Eighteenth Century France', American Historical Review, 75. 6 (Oct 1970), 1610.

⁶¹ Hufton, The Poor of Eighteenth Century France, p. 60.

⁶² AD Marne I J 49 No. 42.

toujours emprunteur et toujours endetté, il vit quelque tems des avances du propriétaire'.⁶³ But the time he gained thereby was short. 'Comment rendre toutes ces avances [d]'une et même plusieurs années?'⁶⁴ In too many instances, the peasant was forced to turn to urban artisans and merchants who became, in the word of the notary Nausser from Quinson, 'les usuriers profiteurs des besoins des malheureux pour parvenir à remplir leurs coffres forts des biens des pauvres pères de familles'.⁶⁵

Years of accumulated debt following the recurrent bad harvests that marked the decade from 1765⁶⁶ created what these essayists described as a prolonged and serious crisis of credit in peasant finances. As a result, the eviction of the tenant farmer and a rapid turnover in leaseholders became a common sight for provincials like the Châlons essayists. They remarked that not only were the old proprietary classes from the First and Second estates seeking greater profits from their land for the booming grain markets of this decade, they were being joined in squeezing as much as possible from the tenant farmer by bourgeois merchants and even artisans who had entered the rural land market either by loaning money to penurious peasants or by investing their wealth directly in land to capitalize on the boom in land prices and rents.⁶⁷ These profit-minded proprietors saw to

⁶³ AD Marne I J 41 No. 89. The author was François Hubert Aubert, who on the chit on which his name was given qualified himself as 'avocat au parlement de Nancy, sous bibliothécaire de Lo, ancien avocat du roy de Pologne et cy devant ministre de plusieurs princes d'Allemagne'. I have as yet been unable to find any further information about him.

⁶⁴ AD Marne I J 49 No. 42.

⁶⁵ AD Marne I J 49 No. 5.

⁶⁶ Morineau, Les Faux-semblants d'un démarrage économique, p. 331 and Steven L. Kaplan, Bread, Politics and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV, 2 vols (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), I, 86.

⁶⁷ AD Marne I J 49 Nos. 5 and 38. On the process of consolidation of small properties through bourgeois lending see Marc Bloch, French Rural History: An Essay on its Basic Characteristics, translated by Janet

it that 'à chaque renouvellement de bail, c'est une augmentation annuelle [...] qui n'a jamais qu'un seul et même motif, celui d'enrichir le riche aux dépens du pauvre, de l'engraisser de son sang'.⁶⁸ And, if the tenant failed to meet his obligations, the proprietor or creditor had no hesitation -- at least in the observation of these essayists -- about forcing the tenant off the land. 'Protégés par ses lois il exige avec le dernier rigueur tout ce qui lui est dû.'⁶⁹ Notwithstanding the fact that already 'ses pauvres malheureux ont fait la majeure partie des dépenses [...] on les voit expulsés pour en procurer le payment des arrérages'.⁷⁰ And, as more and more of the landless peasants born in the decades from

Sondheimer (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1966), p. 140 and Braudel and Labrousse, Histoire économique et sociale, II, 149.

⁶⁸ Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 866. The author of this essay was a lawyer called Fauconpret who lived in the Marais in Paris.

⁶⁹ AD Marne I J 41 No. 87.

⁷⁰ AD Marne I J 49 No. 5. Nausser was a notary and must surely have been witness many times to the calling in of bailiffs to repossess a farm; he was especially critical of the stewards of the big seigneurial landlords: 'Ce qui me révolte le plus chez les fermiers généraux des terres des grands seigneurs et autres personnes possédant des grands biens est leurs cruautés envers leurs sous fermiers à raison des arrérages qu'ils leur doivent.' Throwing them off the land was only the first step taken by these cruel stewards. 'C'est là quoi que cruel ne seroit rien encore si ses laboureurs ainsi expulsés des ménageries pouvoient se dire d'aller habiter leurs maisons et cultiver leurs terres'. But, no, 'à la requête du fermier général, de Mr le Marquis, il faut donc vendre [leur maison et leur terre] ou le desemparer au créancier sans quoi l'on met pour combler d'orreur le contrainte par corps. [...] après avoir ainsi dépouillé ces malheureux laboureurs de leurs petites fortunes l'on va les faire mourir dans une prison trop peu faite pour eux [...] dans la quelle on les y detient autant qu'on le peut pour que si leurs femmes ont quelques biens elles les obligent pour la délivrance de leurs maris.'

The Versailles choirmaster Rabigot Delacroix had no more generous view of the cupidity of those who profited from the distress of the peasantry: 'Bien loin de penser à secourir des malheureux combien voit on des riches avarés exiger impitoyablement que de pauvres débiteurs leur abandonnent presque pour rien le peu de bien qui leur reste, afin de satisfaire leur insatiable cupidité.' AD Marne I J 39 No. 29.

mid-century onward sought tenancies at whatever terms they could get, the process repeated itself, spreading misery across the face of France.

Le paysan qui prend la place vacante se marie sur les mêmes espérances que le premier; il est exposé à la même incertitude et souvent il éprouve les mêmes malheurs; ainsi les mariages se multiplient et la misère s'accroît.⁷¹

The pace of peasant emiseration was accelerated still further by the spread of what a curé from the Ile de France described as an 'espèce de maladie épidémique qui gagne de plus en plus parmi nous et qui va concentrer chez deux ou trois cens milles citoiens les biens des plus de vingt millions d'habitans qu'elle affecte de laisser dans un dépouillement absolu'.⁷² This curé, along with a score of other essayists, insisted that parallel to the demographic trend that was increasing the number of subsistence micro-proprietors and raising the demand for tenant farms there existed a long-term social and economic trend toward consolidation of land into larger and larger holdings that was reducing still further the land held by individual peasant families. Writing from Picardy, Upper Normandy, the Ile de France, the Orléans, Champagne and Alsace and Lorraine -- that is, from the regions which historians have determined were most dominated by large-scale exploitation in the second half of the century⁷³ -- each of these essayists shared a clear perception that the engrossing of property in his region was transforming both social and economic relations and making the distinction between dominating and dominated daily more apparent.

The malady -- 'la fureur de joindre maison à maison, héritage à héritage et de réunir par cette opération dans une seule main presque tous

⁷¹ AD Marne I J 41 No. 87.

⁷² AD Marne I J 41 No. 90.

⁷³ LeRoy Ladurie, L'Age classique des paysans, Vol. II of Histoire de la France rurale, p. 412 and following.

les fonds d'un contrée'⁷⁴ -- had its source, according to this group of essayists, in three distinct but complementary economic, political and philosophical trends: first, the rise of a new economic elite which embraced the values of the old elite and sought the external signs of social superiority in landed wealth and privileged tax exemption; second, the ruinous state of French finances and of many small peasant holders which, over the course of the century, permitted this new elite to exploit the weakness of both Crown and peasant, investing its wealth in land and in office which carried fiscal privilege; and, finally and third, the triumph of physiocratic economic principles that not only encouraged the consolidation of property but influenced the government to pass edicts that ultimately benefited not the labouring classes but rather the propertied and commercial interests who thereby increased still further their control of the land and grain markets.

'Les plus habiles', lamented a priest familiar with the accelerating trend toward more large-scale farming in the Pays de Caux, 'ont dépouillé du patrimoine naturel les simples en vertu des formalités reçues'.⁷⁵ 'Aujourd'hui tout est changé', a priest from Picardy reported. 'Une économie barbare, dictée par l'avarice a porté le ravage et la désolation [...]. On a abattu ces aziles qui auroient dû être jamais sacrés. Des petites fermes ont été réunies à des grandes'.⁷⁶ And still another essayist, describing the region around Versailles -- where by the revolution 70% of all family heads were without property⁷⁷ -- wrote: 'Les

⁷⁴ AD Marne I J 41 No. 90.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ AD Marne I J 39 No. 25.

⁷⁷ Georges Lefebvre, 'The Place of the Revolution in the Agrarian History of France', translated by Elborg Forster, in Rural Society in France: Selections from the 'Annales: Économies, Sociétés,

grands et les riches -- ces heureux du siècle' (who, he notes parenthetically, 'vivent dans l'opulence quoique la plupart ne soyent que d'insolents parvenus') were using any means at their disposal to 'dépouill[er] les pauvres familles', in order to 'donner trois, six, huit fermes à un seul fermier qui par-là devient le tiran de son canton et dans la suite il devient le destructeur'.⁷⁸ The result of this process, concluded an essayist from Soissons, 'c'est la ruine du menu peuples et de tous les ouvriers'.⁷⁹

These essayists had witnessed the emergence of a new 'classe propriétaire' -- an amalgam of wealthy members of the first, second and third estates who, exploiting the prerogatives of seigneurial privilege and the weaknesses of the Crown's fiscal system, had amassed huge fortunes secured in land and agricultural income. This class was gradually increasing the already disproportionate share of land and marketable grain held by a wealthy minority of privileged Frenchmen. Thus, 'à proportion que s'est élevé l'édifice des fortunes particulières', explained a worried priest, 's'est enfoncé dans la misère un peuple d'utiles cultivateurs'.⁸⁰

Like one in every two of his fellow essayists, the royal officer Clicquot de Blervache considered the increasing domination of most of France's arable land by an emerging class of notables as a primary cause

Civilizations', edited by Robert Forster and Orest Ranum (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 35.

⁷⁸ AD Marne I J 39, No. 29. In Versailles Rabigot had a particularly clear vantage point for observing the great divide separating the very rich and the very poor. Despite the opulence all around him, Louis XVI was himself troubled by 'la grande quantité de mendiants dont les rues de Paris et de Versailles sont remplies'. Letter from the King to his minister Amelot, cited by Camille Bloch in L'Assistance et l'État, p. 219.

⁷⁹ 'Ce qui détruit le plus les campagnes, c'est la jonction de deux fermes ensemble et quelque fois trois.' AD Marne I J 41 No. 82.

⁸⁰ AD Marne I J 49 No. 40.

of the present deteriorating economic situation of the French peasantry. 'La principale cause de la malheureuse condition des habitants des campagnes provient de l'inégalité et des richesses produites par la féodalité', he wrote. Yet, he reminded the Crown, 'cette inégalité a été depuis un siècle puissamment secondée [...] par les principes adoptés par le régime de vos finances. Ces principes' -- which, he lamented, allowed wealthy roturiers to purchase offices conferring nobility and tax exemption, or, to tender loans to the Crown which also gave them tax privilege⁸¹ -- had, in the estimation of this royal official, 'donné lieu à des fortunes énormes [et] ont en même temps mis dans la main d'un très petit nombre d'individus, un très grand nombre de trop grandes propriétés'. Prosperity and the rising class of men who used their new wealth to purchase land and privilege and gain a measure of respectability in the emerging society of landed 'notables' had 'aggravé le mal causé par la féodalité' and permitted 'l'homme riche [à] acheter des grandes seigneuries [...] de profiter du dérangement de ses voisins [et de] réuni[r] en peu de temps une infinité de petites propriétés à son domaine'.⁸²

⁸¹ Bibliothèque Nationale Fonds français 11420, II, 59. 'Les emprunts et les formes des emprunts se sont multipliés à l'infini. Création d'offices avec gages et attributions, créations de communautés et de maîtrises, créations de rentes perpétuelles, création de rentes viagères, de loteries, de tontines, etc. [...] service militaire, service domestique chez le Roi, judicature, police, finance, tout fut mis à prix d'argent. Les emprunts ont multiplié les privilèges et les exemptions'.

⁸² Offering as evidence the personal testimony of a fellow royal official, Clicquot insisted that not only was the consolidation of property by the rich hurting the microproprietors whose land they purchased; it was also having a disastrous effect on royal finances. 'Voici un fait que je tiens d'une personne digne de confiance qui a été autrefois contrôleur des aides en France. "Quelque tems après que je fus arrivé dans mon département," me dit il, "j'examinai la liste des privilégiés. Je trouvai dans le nombre un particulier riche. Il avoit des propriétés foncières dont le revenu pouvoit monter annuellement à sept à huit milles livres. Parmi ces propriétés il y avoit beaucoup de vignes. Je lui fis représenter ces titres. Je vis effectivement qu'ils l'exemptoient de la taille, du droit de gros sur les vins, de quête et de garde, du logement de gens de guerre, &c.... Je calculai que ce particulier auroit payé à l'Etat sept

Economic circumstances had provided these men with the opportunity to purchase and consolidate their hold upon the land; but a new economic theory lent it respectability. In obvious reference to Quesnay and those who surrounded him at Versailles, the Versailles choirmaster Rabigot Delacroix blamed the misery that followed consolidation upon 'les apôtres, les docteurs qui enseignent aux français à devenir des tigres',⁸³ while an essayist from Bordeaux likened the spread of their views to one of 'des fléaux singuliers qui ont quelquefois affligé le genre humain'.⁸⁴ Those whom he sarcastically called 'ces affectueux amis du pauvre peuple, nos tendres économistes des dernières années' were in his view decimating the people with their ideas encouraging the agglomeration of property, free market wages and high-priced grain. By appealing to the spirit of property and self-interest, the leaders of this 'secte' had -- in the words of still another essayist -- 'canonized' and propagated by their doctrine a mentality that had long dominated the propertied classes in France.

à huit cens livres annuellement en raison de ses possessions, et de la nature de leur produit. Il s'en étoit affranchi par l'acquisition d'une charge de trois mille livres environ. Cette charge avoit la dénomination singulière de musette du Poitou."

'Chacun scait que l'épuisement des finances a donné lieu à la création d'un nombre infini de charges dans le service domestique du Roy et des Princes, et combien on a attribué de franchises à ces charges inutiles dont la plupart des titulaires ne font aucune fonction.' Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420, II, 163.

For discussion of the merchandising of fiscal exemption through the sale of venal office and of 'seigneurial rights' and the merging of noble and bourgeois values in Old Regime France see Colin Lucas, 'Nobles, Bourgeois and the Origins of the French Revolution', Past and Present, 60 (August 1973), 84-126. In a recent article, '4 August 1789: The Intellectual Background to the Abolition of Venality of Offices', William Doyle argues that the long-standing dissatisfaction with the abuses of venality which eased their early abolition by the National Assembly was common in the eighteenth century even among those who themselves owned such offices. Australian Journal of French Studies, XXIX, No 2-3 (1992), 230-40.

⁸³ AD Marne I J 39 No. 29.

⁸⁴ AD Marne I J 38 No. 10.

A l'égard des grandes cultures, ils n'en ont point été les inventeurs. Le mal existoit déjà en France, avant qu'on eût seulement entendu parler de leur doctrine; ils n'ont fait que le canoniser. L'esprit de propriété et d'intérêt avoit aussi poussé d'assez profondes racines pour n'avoir pas besoin de leurs exhortations.⁸⁵

Unlike this essayist, most of the Châlons competitors seem unaware of the doctrines and economic theory of the physiocrats, although condemning the results of its application. Yet without citing the physiocrats by name, the essayists were nevertheless consistently critical of recent royal edicts which implemented policies influenced by physiocratic thought. They voiced strong opposition to the edicts, dating from the mid-sixties onwards, which permitted the enclosure of common land and private cultivation of byways and other waste land which had formerly provided peasants with scraps of land and gleaning rights. They insist repeatedly that despite protestations to the contrary, the interests of 'les pauvres malheureux habitants' had not been served by these edicts and this because, just as when the powerful feudal lords originally had taken possession of territory, once again property was being apportioned 'par la loi du plus fort'.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, although the edicts affecting property rights had already begun to introduce significant and long-term changes in the use of property by reducing the amount of land available for

⁸⁵ Charles Robert Gosselin, Réflexions d'un citoyen adressées aux notables sur la question proposée par un grand roi: 'En quoi consiste le bonheur des peuples & quels sont les moyens de la procurer?' ou cette autre: 'D'où vient la misère des peuples & quels sont les moyens d'y remédier?' (Paris, 1787), p. 55. This is the published version of an essay inspired by the Academy's competition questions.

⁸⁶ AD Marne I J 41 No. 71. See also I J 39 No. 33, and I J 49 No. 7, Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420 and Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 1275. Professor Marc Bloch provided a still unsurpassed survey of all these edicts and their reception in the provinces in his study 'La Lutte pour l'individualisme agraire dans la France du XVIII^e siècle. Première partie: L'Oeuvre des pouvoirs d'ancien régime. Deuxième partie: Conflits et résultats', Annales d'histoire économique et sociale, 2 (15 juillet-15 octobre 1930), 329-83 and 511-56.

peasant cultivation, the government edicts which had experimented with a deregulation of the grain trade had had, the essayists declare, more immediate and even more disastrous effects on the peasantry.

Under the banner of 'liberty', the proponents of the new prosperity had persuaded the Crown to remove restrictions upon the grain trade and to renounce its traditional role as victualer of the people.⁸⁷ Yet, the liberalization of the grain trade which had been established in edicts of 1763 and 1764⁸⁸ and had been heralded as the gateway to a new age, in the view of the Châlons essayists, had only allowed those who had consolidated their hold on land and marketable grain over the last century to profit further from the misery of the people. Based upon the promise that deregulation would eventually increase productivity, these edicts 'avoient commencé par rendre le pain très cher', but the only result the poor had seen, the essayist Senger noted dryly, was that they had made 'ceux qui en vendent [...] très riches'.⁸⁹ Senger's view was confirmed by a fellow essayist, who had once been a proponent of liberalization. In the 1750s Jean-Baptiste Bizet of Amiens had won first prize in a competition held by the Academy of Lyon on 'Des avantages et des inconvénients de la libre

⁸⁷ AD Marne I J 39 No. 33.

⁸⁸ Steven Kaplan's study of the social, economic and political context in which the liberalization of the grain trade was essayed under Louis XV and of the reluctance of provincial officials to enforce it provides the administrative counterpart to the more general public opposition expressed in the Châlons essays to the edicts of 1763 and 1764. Kaplan considers the Crown's renunciation of its subsistence responsibilities and its experimentation with liberalization among the most revolutionary reforms attempted at any time before 1789. See, too, Jean Airiau, L'Opposition aux Physiocrates à la fin de l'Ancien régime (Paris, R. Pichon et R. Durand-Auzias, 1965) and Spurlock, 'What Price Economic Prosperity? Public Attitudes to Physiocracy in the Reign of Louis XVI', British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies, 9 (1986), 183-96.

⁸⁹ AD Marne I J 38 No. 10. The essayist, who was writting for the competition on the beggar, is Jean Frédéric Senger or Singer, from Bordeaux.

exportation des blés' for his essay favouring free trade. He had even been officially congratulated by the government for his essay. Nevertheless, by the time he wrote his Châlons essay thirty years later, Bizet had come to view deregulation in a wholly different and, he would add, more realistic light.

Nous pensons que l'augmentation des revenus des propriétaires qui résulteroit du haut prix des grains doit moins être considérée comme un moyen propre à augmenter la consommation dans le royaume que comme un moyen qui serviroit à y accroître leur fortune et surtout celle des grands et à y esimiler entre leurs mains les fonds de terre qui n'y sont déjà que trop infructueusement rassemblés'.⁹⁰

The Châlons essayists based their judgement of the deregulation of the grain trade, commons enclosure and waste land cultivation not on philosophic argument but on the observable effect on the countryside of such measures. They concluded that the edicts would ultimately result not in an amelioration of conditions for the labouring poor, but rather in an increase in the property and profit of the substantial landowners who already controlled the marketed grain and the land on which the microproprietor or micro-tenant and the landless labouring peasantry relied to live. These reforms, and the social and economic philosophy which lay behind them, granted official recognition to a process that the essayists warned had long been revolutionizing the traditional rural economy: the transfer of marketable produce and land to the control of a minority. A Parisian, summarizing the view of many of her fellow essayists, offered the most succinct statement of the results of this process: 'Les riches sont

⁹⁰ AD Marne I J 49 No. 38. I am grateful to Professor Philippe Sueur whose research in the archives at Amiens revealed this background information to Bizet's Châlons essay and further details of his life and career.

les propriétaires de la substance de tous les autres hommes. Ils possèdent toutes les terres, les maisons [...] les denrées'.⁹¹

Observation of demographic, economic and political trends had persuaded the Frenchmen writing for the Châlons Academy's contests that the combined effect of these developments was to decrease the number of owner occupiers and dramatically increase the number of peasants who relied for their livelihood primarily on rented land and marketed grain.⁹² As each year rent and grain prices rose, it became increasingly essential for the peasants without sufficient land by which to feed their families to rely upon outside employment for longer periods in the year. Yet, as the essayists noted, although 'cette industrie devient dans mille cas le supplément nécessaire [...] a[u] particulier chargé d'une famille nombreuse qui ne sçaurait trouver dans le produit de ses fonds insuffisant toutes les ressources nécessaires dont il a besoin',⁹³ increasingly the microproprietor found himself competing for work with landless peasants whose numbers were driving the wages of day labour far below what the rise in grain prices should have made them. Combined with rising bread prices the resulting un- or under-employment which was the inevitable outcome of a labour market crowded with surplus labourers was for the landless nothing

⁹¹ AD Marne I J 39 No. 27. Mme d'Eglain [or possibly, 'de Glain']. Unfortunately I have as yet been unable to find any more information about this essayist, except that she gave her address as : 'rue Mélé, maison du char[r]on vis-à-vis le commandement de la Garde de Paris'.

⁹² Through local and regional studies historians have determined that by the revolution at least 80% of peasant families in Normandy, 75% in the coastal plains of Flanders and in lower Provence, 60% in the Laonnais and 40% in Burgundy and in Limousin were without sufficient land to feed their families. Loutchisky, L'État des classes agricoles, pp. 20-35; Lefebvre, 'Place of the Revolution in the Agrarian History of France', p. 35; LeRoy Ladurie, l'Age classique des paysans, pp. 404-21.

⁹³ AD Marne I J 40 No. 90, the curé Gaillard, writing from Neuille St Front.

short of catastrophic: 'il n'a pas toujours de quoy manger parce qu'il n'a pas toujours de quoy travailler'.⁹⁴

PLIGHT OF THE PRIMARILY WAGE-EARNING POOR

Helpless before a demographic surge that increased the population by almost a third between 1700 and the revolution,⁹⁵ the wage-earning poor suffered both as producers and consumers under the mechanisms of supply and demand. Natural increase and the steady influx into the job market of peasants who had lost their land or who were increasingly unable to feed their families from insubstantial holdings had by Louis XVI's reign flooded the labour pool with millions of people seeking paid work.⁹⁶ Upon entering the labour market they found that like anything else in a market economy 'c'est la concurrence dans les choses qui y met le prix'.⁹⁷ 'Dans un pays comme la France', wrote the essayist Bizet, 'où la population est abondante les prix des travaux' seemed to 'suivre le cours de toute espèce de marchandise dont la valeur diminue lorsqu'elle est commun'.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ AD Marne I J 50 No. 2. Collin.

⁹⁵ Jacques Dupaquier estimated a population of 21.5 million in 1700 and one of 28.1 million in 1790. J. Dupaquier, 'Les Caractères originaux de l'histoire démographique française au XVIII^e siècle', Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine, 23 (1975), 188.

⁹⁶ Labrousse, 'The Crisis in the French Economy at the End of the Old Regime', p. 66.

⁹⁷ AD Marne I J 40 No. 70. The essayist is Sabbathier.

⁹⁸ AD Marne I J 49 No 38 and Bibliothèque Nationale fonds française 11420. The influence of demand upon wages was a theme developed by Helvetius in De l'Esprit. Clicquot de Blervache is the only essayist who cites this work and yet is only one of many insisting upon the interplay of supply and demand in setting wage, rent and grain prices. See in particular AD Marne I J 38 No. 8, I J 39 Nos 25 and 29, I J 40 No. 70, I J 41 No. 87, and I J 49 Nos 21, 38, and 42.

But the market's influence upon the labourer's life did not end with the wages it granted him and the other desperate poor who competed with him for work. These men were consumers as well as producers and the long-term trend of real wages over the century was in perceptible decline relative to the rising price of bread. Once again the conjuncture of demographic and economic forces worked to the honest labourer's disadvantage. 'Leur concurrence fait baisser les prix de leurs travaux tandis que les denrées augmentent de valeur.' The result, according to this essayist, the curé Du Verger: 'le salaire est devenu en raison invertie du prix de la nourriture'.⁹⁹

Deregulation of the grain trade, increased demand, and a decade of poor harvests all contributed to the continued rise in the price of bread. 'Il faut aujourd'hui aux manouvriers', wrote the former baker's helper become academician Jacques Sellier, 'le double d'argent pour leur subsistance et cependant ils ne gagnent pas plus qu'il y a cinquante ans où les vivres étoient moitié marché; ils n'ont donc que la moitié de leur nécessaire.'¹⁰⁰ Estimates vary from region to region and essayist to essayist about the decline in real wages relative to the price of bread but the overwhelming conviction of nearly half of all the essayists was that the wage-earning classes, as a consequence of this trend, were being reduced to a state of perpetual undernourishment. 'Tous ceux qui ont besoin du produit de leurs travaux de chaque jour pour pourvoir à leur

⁹⁹ AD Marne I J 39 No. 24. Du Verger was curé of Bezinghem in what would become the department of the Pas-de-Calais. Professor Labrousse estimated that wages increased by only 22% in the last two decades of the Old Regime while grain prices rose by 65% in the same period. C.E. Labrousse, Esquisse du mouvement des prix et des revenus en France au XVIII^e siècle (Paris, Dalloz, 1933).

¹⁰⁰ AD Somme C 33 (1), Jacques Sellier, 'Mémoire sur la mendicité et sur les moyens d'entretenir les chemins publics en abolissant la corvée'.

subsistance' were, Bizet wrote, 'dans un état assez ordinaire de disette ou même de souffrance'.¹⁰¹

All talk of ameliorating the situation of the wage-earning poor was futile, these essayists insisted, if one failed to recognize that 'ce qui constitue la condition des journaliers et des hommes de peine c'est la facilité plus ou moins grande qu'ils trouvent dans le produit de leurs travaux pour se procurer leur subsistance'. If, 'comme il arrive souvent, ces travaux sont assez ingrats pour ne remplir cet objet qu'en partie, leur condition devient un état de disette plus ou moins grande à proportion de ce qu'il leur manque pour le remplir'.¹⁰²

Numbers alone were sufficient to drive wages down; yet, in addition to this almost Malthusian analysis of the pressure of population upon the labour market -- a view common to many of the Châlons contestants -- one finds in a few essays a clear perception of the exploitative nature of relations between employer and employed that is rare in this period apart from the writings of Linguet and Necker (whose writings would be unfamiliar to most of the essayists).¹⁰³ These essayists expressed such understanding of the plight of the labouring poor that it would almost seem as if their essays had been written from the poor man's perspective for nowhere do they attempt to justify low wages, as for example Turgot and the Physiocrats did, on the basis of arguments that lower wages would keep the

¹⁰¹ AD Marne I J 49 No 38. See also I J 49 No. 37 and I J 50 No. 2.

¹⁰² AD Marne I J 49 No. 38.

¹⁰³ Writing about popular movements among workers in Paris in the years leading up to the Revolution, George Rudé confirmed that employees rarely took industrial action in demand of higher wages: 'it was the food riot rather than the strike that was still the traditional and typical form of popular protest'. The Crowd in the French Revolution (Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 22. If recognition of oppressive wage mechanisms was rare in urban industrial relations, how much rarer would have been the protests against low agricultural wages voiced by these essayists?

cost of French agricultural and manufactured goods down and therefore make them more profitable, increasing productivity and competitiveness.¹⁰⁴ These essayists maintain instead that a crowded labour market endowed those in the propertied or entrepreneurial classes with the power to exploit the labouring poor, doling out work almost like a privilege at whatever wages best suited them. Rabigot Delacroix made his views clear on the market mechanism, and on those who exploited them:

Pourquoi voit-on tant de misère parmi les ouvriers, tant des villes que de la campagne, si ce n'est que le riche qui fait travailler donne le moins de salaire qu'il peut aux ouvriers qu'il emploie.¹⁰⁵

The poor man's desperation and his dependence upon getting work forced him to accept whatever wages the employer offered.

La nécessité où il est de travailler est pour lui un besoin impérieux qui lui impose l'obligation de se charger de ses travaux lors même que la cherté des grains rendent leur produit insuffisant pour sa subsistance.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion of Turgot's view of wages in a competitive labour and commodity market see H. Grange, 'Turgot et Necker devant le problème des salaires', Annales historiques de la Révolution française, 29 (Jan-Mars 1957), pp. 19-33. Both Clicquot de Blervache and Bizet concede that low wages would reduce costs and therefore the price of French manufactured goods abroad; but, as we shall see, these two Châlons essayists argue that if wages were kept low, the Crown should see that bread prices were kept correspondingly low.

¹⁰⁵ AD Marne I J 39, No. 29. A passage from Necker's Sur la législation et le commerce des grains, published just as the Academy was announcing its first contest question, closely parallels Rabigot's position in both style and substance. In answer to his own rhetorical question 'd'où vient sa [the people's] misère [...] et quelle en sera la source éternelle?' Necker replies: 'C'est le pouvoir qu'ont les propriétaires de ne donner en échange d'un travail qui leur est agréable que le plus petit salaire possible, c'est à dire, celui qui représente le plus étroit nécessaire. Or ce pouvoir entre les mains des propriétaires est fondé sur leur très petit nombre, en comparaison de celui des hommes sans propriété; sur la concurrence de ces derniers, et principalement sur la prodigieuse inégalité qu'il y a entre les hommes qui vendent leur travail pour vivre aujourd'hui et ceux qui l'achètent pour augmenter simplement leur luxe ou leurs commodités [...] les uns donneront toujours la loi, les autres seront toujours contraints de la recevoir.' The passage is quoted by H. Grange, 'Turgot et Necker', p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ I J 49 No. 38.

Helplessly condemned by something that from the pens of these essayists sounds very like an iron law of wages, the poor man had no alternative but to 'se resigner à souffrir en retranchant sur son nécessaire' for, as Bizet remarked ruefully, 'il n'est pas en état de faire lui-même la loi'.¹⁰⁷

An already difficult situation had of recent date been made more difficult still by what Rabigot Delacroix called 'la misère du temps'.¹⁰⁸ Not only were more people needing work and earning at declining wages but the number of jobs being offered appeared to the essayists to be declining.¹⁰⁹ Small farmers were no longer always able to pay hired labourers and the large commercial farmer, contrary to what physiocratic doctrine had promised, seemed to be not augmenting the number of workers in his employ but rather reducing them to the barest minimum.

Hard times had reduced both the number of small farms and the economic margins that had permitted those small farmers who remained -- now essentially métayers themselves -- to hire day- and casual-labourers. As one essayist, himself a tenant farmer, reported: 'Le journalier, l'homme de peine est devenu inutile au métayer [...]. Labourant luy-même ses terres, battant ses grains, faisant garder ses animaux par ses enfants, [...] le métayer n'a besoin de personne'.¹¹⁰ And, in any case, notes

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ad Marne I J 39 No. 29.

¹⁰⁹ Research by Professor Labrousse indicated that the total number of employed persons declined in this period. 'Crisis in the French Economy at the End of the Old Regime', p. 65.

¹¹⁰ AD Marne I J 49 No. 42. Georges Lefebvre confirms that in the département of the Nord the journalier was dispensed with whenever hard times occurred. Les Paysans du Nord, p. 279. Morineau notes a similar reaction among cultivators in Brittany following hard times caused by continuous rain: 'elle annonçait la ruine des journaliers parce que les cultivateurs, eux-mêmes dans la gêne, en étaient revenus au vieux système d'entraide mutuelle travaillent les uns pour les autres par semaine et par ménage. Réaction de défense contre l'appauvrissement qui aboutit au sacrifice de plus pauvres que soi.' Morineau, Les Faux Semblants, p. 331.

another essayist, 'ayant à peine de quoy payer son maître et suffire aux impositions royales, le cultivateur se trouve dans l'impossibilité de faire travailler le journalier'.¹¹¹

Contrary to those who promised that the prosperous would 'jouir de leur opulence [...] en faisant beaucoup travailler' -- an obvious reference to the Physiocrats¹¹² -- the Châlons essayists insist that a principal effect of the consolidation of property into large holdings was not only that bread prices had risen far more rapidly than had wages but that the large holdings were cultivated much less intensively and productively and therefore supported fewer families than had been possible when they were exploited by small owner occupiers or tenants.¹¹³ Rather than employ the

¹¹¹ Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 863, an unidentified essayist from Champagne. For a similar assessment of the situation of the agricultural wage labour market in Picardy see AD Marne I J 40 No. 57, by the priest Le Tonnellier from Autrèches in the diocese of Soissons.

¹¹² AD Marne I J 38 No. 10, J.-F. Senger. An explicit aim of the physiocrats was to reduce the number of proprietors in France to approximately one million with the rest of the population employed as wage labourers on their land. Mirabeau wrote in his Ami des hommes: 'Le pauvre n'a d'intérêt que d'être au milieu d'une forte agriculture dont les travaux multipliés le font vivre et le rendre nécessaire [...]. Il n'a pas besoin d'être propriétaire.' Ami des hommes, 5e partie, T. III (Paris, 1760), p. 70.

The following passage reproduces the essayist Senger's cynical assessment of physiocratic reasoning: 'Ces affectueux amis du pauvre peuple [...] nos tendres économistes des années derniers [...] raisonnaient ainsy: quand le pain sera très cher, ceux qui en vendent seront très riches; quand ils seront très riches, il ne pourront jouir de leur opulence qu'en faisant beaucoup travailler. Quand le travail sera commun les ouvriers seront recherchés, et leur salaire deviendra plus considérable. Il n'y aura donc plus de pauvres n'y de mendiants et tout le monde sera heureux sur ce globe'. But, he adds, 'en attendant la fin de ce cercle, ils avoient commencé par rendre le pain très cher et pour peu que les choses eussent duré tous les pauvres seroient morts de faim avant l'époque glorieuse de la félicité publique'.

¹¹³ As we shall see, almost half the essayists writing for the Châlons questions on the plight of the begging and labouring poor favour the break up of large holdings and their cultivation by peasants with a direct interest in increasing productivity. These essayists argued, as did Henry-Joseph van der Borcht, 'doyen des Brasseurs à Bruxelles', that 'il est plus avantageux d'avoir dix petits paisans pour 100 [...] arpens, que bien un

enormous body of landless peasants whom consolidation had in part created, large proprietors 'ne font plus travailler les journaliers sur leurs terres'; instead they 'sont venus consommer à la ville ou à la cour tous leurs revenus et même s'y endetter'.¹¹⁴ Rare in the essayists' experience was the large proprietor who reinvested his profits in the land because, in the words of an essayist from Berry, although 'on aime bien recevoir de l'argent [...] on n'aime point en déboursier'. The pattern that they observed more usually was that of the non-resident proprietor who 'jouit et n'ameliore pas [...] ne plante pas [...] ne répare pas. Loin d'employer le présent au profit de l'avenir, il dévore souvent tous les deux'.¹¹⁵

But the 'misère du temps' was not restricted in its effects to the agricultural sector. Demographic pressure and rising bread prices had had a profound effect upon rural manufacturing as well. Throughout the lifetime of the Châlons essayists rural industry, particularly textiles, had provided an important safety-valve for the burgeoning peasant

grand, car un doit négliger que dix avec le pel peuvent bien cultiver, ce qu'on voit ici par experience, que leurs terres et fruits surpacent ceux de grands paisans'. (AD Marne I J 40 No. 53).

The laboureur Fequant le jeune agreed: 'Les gros emplois d'agriculture, c'est-à-dire les labourages de 4. 5. 6. charrues et plus sont très embarrassants souvent négligés et difficiles à conduire. Ceux qui les font valoir en propre ou à loyer, dans la vue de profiter d'avantage, en sont très souvent dupes, parce que le profit est moins grand, relativement à l'exploitation que si le même employ étoit divisé en deux, ou en trois établissemens particuliers'. Indeed, he added, 'il y a très peu de paroisses en France qu'il n'y ait de ces gros Emplois, qui, s'ils étoient divisés par moitié, par tiers, par quart, formeroient plusieurs établissemens au lieu d'un seul et par conséquent trois ou quatre chefs de famille de plus en chaque paroisse.' AD Marne I J 49 No. 23.

¹¹⁴ Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 863.

¹¹⁵ AD Marne I J 49 No. 37. Robert Forster in his study of the Burgundian estates of the Saulx-Tavannes family confirms that on these estates reinvestment, repairs, etc., were kept at the strictest minimum so that the Duke of Saulx-Tavannes was able to have almost 80% of his gross landed income for expenses in Paris. Forster, The House of Saulx-Tavannes: Versailles and Burgundy, 1700-1830, p. 105.

population -- providing secondary seasonal employment for agricultural labourers and their families in regions where land was poor or peasant holdings small¹¹⁶ and primary employment for both men and women in regions like the north, northeast and northwest where population had far outstripped the amount of land available for cultivation. Work as domestic textile producers had helped compensate for insufficient land or agricultural work throughout much of France and created a peasant-worker hybrid increasingly dependent on the double uncertainty of the agricultural market for its bread and raw materials and the industrial market for its wages and the sale of the goods it helped to manufacture.¹¹⁷

Like every other Frenchman without enough land to feed himself and his family, the peasant-worker was a consumer who bought his grain at prices that continued to rise through most of the seventies.¹¹⁸ Yet, his

¹¹⁶ J. Loutchisky, La Propriété paysanne en France à la veille de la Révolution, particulièrement en Limousin (Paris, Honoré Champion, 1912), p. 80 and following, and Henri See, 'Remarques sur le caractère de l'industrie rurale en France et les causes de son extension au XVIII^e siècle', Revue historique, 1923, pp. 47-53.

¹¹⁷ On the subject of rural industrialization see Eugene Tarlé, L'Industrie dans les campagnes en France à la fin de l'Ancien régime (Paris, Édouard Corneley et Cie, 1910) and Braudel and Labrousse, Histoire économique et sociale, II, 217-220; see also Aux origines de la révolution industrielle: Industrie rurale et fabriques, Numéro spécial de la Revue du Nord, Vol. 61, No. 240 (Jan-Mars 1979) edited by Pierre Deyon and others, for its discussion of the interplay between demographic growth and the labour, agricultural, and industrial markets in the highly industrialized regions of northern France. The reader is also referred to the work of Franklin F. Mendels, 'Industrialization and Population Pressure in Eighteenth Century Flanders' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1969) and 'Proto-industrialization: The First Phase of the Industrial Process', Journal of Economic History, 32 (March 1972), 241-62. I am indebted to Professor Peter Mathias of Downing College, Cambridge, for allowing me to read a typescript version of Professor Mendels' paper 'Seasons and Regions in Agriculture and Industry during the Process of Industrialization'.

¹¹⁸ Professor Labrousse in his 'Crisis in the French Economy at the End of the Old Regime' notes that even after wholesale grain prices began to fall after 1778, retail prices dropped more slowly and the prices of meat, wood, rent, colonial products and even clothes went up.

job, like that of anyone else in a crowded labour market, depended on the competitiveness of the wages he asked, because, as one essayist remarked cynically, 'dans les choses relatives au commerce [...] l'appas du meilleur marché emporte toujours les préférences'.¹¹⁹ And because the rural spinner or weaver attracted the urban entrepreneur to his cottage by agreeing to accept wages lower than that asked by his urban counterpart, he was frequently no better off financially than the agricultural labourer in steady work.¹²⁰ In some areas, particularly in the north of France, where the majority of the Châlons essayists lived, the number of peasant workers seeking employment in domestic industry was so great that wages in this sector, too, were declining. An essayist from Amiens summarized their plight:

En général ces travaux des manufactures et des arts sont bien moins avantageux qu'autrefois; et [...] depuis que les ouvriers de la campagne sont venu les rechercher et que leurs besoins d'en obtenir leur en a fait à l'envie les uns des autres baisser les prix, la modicité générale de ces prix a été portée au point qu'un grand nombre de ces travaux a cessé de suffire [...] à leur très chétive subsistance.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ AD Marne I J 49 No. 38.

¹²⁰ Georges Lefebvre, after examining the salaries earned by a broad spectrum of workers involved in the production of textiles, coal, glass, iron, tobacco, matches, etc., in the future département of the Nord, concluded that if the wages of the day labourer were calculated including the food he received from his employer, his income was roughly equal to that of workers in industry. Lefebvre, Les Paysans du Nord pendant la Révolution française (Paris, F. Rieder et Cie, 1924), I, 289.

¹²¹ Both Bizet and Panckoucke (who was also from the north, born in Lille (his essay is catalogued as AD Marne I J 39, No. 44)) refer to the increased unemployment among urban artisans as a result of rural wage competition. The former offered this explanation: 'Il est beaucoup de ces travaux qui sont aujourd'hui presque entièrement délaissés aux journaliers répandus dans nos campagnes [...]. La modicité de ces prix [...] a cessé de suffire au besoin de l'artisan des villes.' Declining real wages even for those in work reduced their purchasing power by at least a quarter. Pierre Leon estimates that between the periods 1726-1741 and 1771-1789 the real wages of workers rose by at most 26% against a cost of living rise of 62%. Both bread and rent prices in France's towns continued to rise rapidly throughout the century and by the revolution bread alone represented 88% of an unskilled worker's salary. Pierre Leon,

Yet, low wages -- serious as they were -- were not the gravest threat facing the Frenchmen engaged in traditionally organized but market-orientated industrial work in the seventies and eighties. In the view of the Châlons essayists, far more serious was the menace of massive unemployment resulting from both saturation of the labour market and the economic instability the essayists considered characteristic of the commercial market in industrial and agricultural goods.¹²²

Rising grain prices that influenced the purely agricultural worker only as a consumer doubly determined the industrial worker's fate. As a consumer the industrial labourer was forced to meet market prices for bread and as a producer he suffered each time grain prices were so high as to effect the sale of industrial products. During such periods high prices meant a slower market for all but the most essential goods. 'La plupart des manufactures qui ne sont pas de la première nécessité', wrote Panckoucke, 'sont sujettes à des vicissitudes et des interruptions qui

'Morcellement et émergence du monde ouvrier' in Braudel and Labrousse, Histoire économique et sociale, II, pp. 667 and following.

¹²² Panckoucke, in his essay for the Academy's 1776 competition, described the misery generated by the industrial slump in his native city of Lille the previous year. The slump's effect on those in the countryside who had laboured as out-workers for this industry would have been immediate: 'On comptoit l'année dernière dans la seule ville de lille en flandres vingt sept mille personnes aumônées; ce nombre effraiant forme le tiers de la population. Cependant le principal commerce de cette ville ne consiste qu'en manufactures de laines et de fil qui ne sont guerres sujettes à des interruptions'. AD Marne I J 39 No. 44. It must be said that however illustrative of the economic dependence of those employed in textile manufacture, whether in urban centres or in the rural hinterland, this evidence is cited and used by Panckoucke as part of a larger argument he was making in favour of abolition of the guilds and in support of the less regulated market policies of an unnamed minister recently dismissed from government (undoubtedly Turgot).

privent l'artisan des moiens de subsister [...] et l'exposent aux plus cruelles extrémités'.¹²³

Work in manufacturing was secure only as long as grain prices and supply were stable and population did not rise more quickly than it could be absorbed into the labour force. But this had not been the trend of the population or the economy in recent memory. Consolidation of arable land had not substantially increased agricultural productivity nor had it created new jobs. Instead, wrote the judge Barbe de la Barthe in 1777, it had left the economy with still only 'une certaine somme d'ouvrages à faire' and more than enough men to do them.¹²⁴

What then was to become of 'le superflu de population', asked an essayist from Vexin -- a region where demographic growth had in a generation made paupers of small proprietors -- 'lorsque toutes les terres seront partagées et tous les postes seront remplis?'¹²⁵ 'Lorsque tous

¹²³ AD Marne I J 39 No. 44. Panckoucke seems to have recognized in his region the failure of the agricultural sector to sustain the demographic growth that had been made possible because of labour-intensive industry: 'qui croiroit au premier coup d'oeil', he asked, 'que l'encouragement accordé aux manufactures au delà des bornes prescrites par la nature de chaque pais, & celles surtout qui n'ont qu'un rapport éloigné avec l'agriculture, est souvent une occasion de calamités et la source la plus commune de la mendicité. Cependant rien n'est plus vrai.'

¹²⁴ AD Marne I J 41 No. 87. Historians working in archives in the north of France on patterns of labour and rural industry in the hinterland outside the industrial triangle of Roubaix, Tourcoing and Lille have found that until the mid-sixties rural manufacturing offered a safety valve for the unemployed in the Comines region. Unfortunately, although rural manufacturing provided work for that generation, it also lowered the age of marriage and further accelerated population growth, which eventually and in turn saturated the industrial labour market again and led to blockage and pauperization in the region. See D. Terrier and P. Toutain, 'Pression démographique et marché du travail à Comines au XVIII^e siècle', Revue du Nord (1979), pp. 19-28. Philippe Guignet notes a similar process in the region of Cambrai and Valenciennes. 'Adaptations, mutations et survivances proto-industrielles dans le textile du Cambresis et Valenciennes du XVIII^eème au debut du XX^eème siècle', *Ibid.*, pp. 27-32.

¹²⁵ Gosselin, Réflexions d'un Citoyen, p. 51. Jacques Dupaquier has documented the process of polarization and pauperization in eighteenth-century Vexin. Using records of forty parishes he found that the sons of

les places sont prises', another essayist answered, 'notre ouvrier [...] offrira inutilement ses travaux au public' and he, his wife and his children become 'une famille (economically) surabondante'.¹²⁶

Few public figures dared be so blunt. But, for the Châlons essayists the most obvious explanation for poverty was that France was crowded with

des millions de citoyens qui n'ont pas de quoi vivre, non qu'ils ne travaillent pas, mais parce qu'ils ne trouvent pas à travailler ou parce que le salaire de leur travail ne suffit pas à leur subsistance.¹²⁷

As 'ouvriers surnuméraires' they represented a glut on the job market and their labour -- 'leur seul patrimoine' -- was treated as if it were worthless. And yet, observed an essayist from Bordeaux, somehow society expected them to survive in an economy in which 'on [ne] peut satisfaire aucun besoin sans argent [mais] qui ne livre cet argent qu'en échange d'un travail dont l'occasion les basses classes ne se trouvent pas toujours'.¹²⁸ 'Privés de toutes les ressources honnêtes et de tous les moyens légitimes de fournir autrement à leur entretien ou à celui de leurs familles',¹²⁹ the hopelessly un- or under-employed became 'mendiants

laboureurs who at the beginning of the eighteenth century farmed 10-12 hectares were themselves left with 'un mouchoir de poche' of 2-3 hectares after the land was subdivided between them. By the late eighteenth century the names of these men were no longer to be found in the fiscal lists of the region. Throughout this period the middling laboureur in Vexin lost out to the powerful class of fermiers-laboureurs exploiting 80-100 hectares. Dupaquier's research is cited by LeRoy Ladurie in L'Age classique des paysans, p. 438.

¹²⁶ AD Marne I J 41 No. 87. Barbe de la Barthe, who discoursed at some length on the problem of over-population, wrote: 'lorsque tous les ateliers nécessaires travaillent; lorsque tous les places sont prises [...] notre ouvrier [...] offrira donc inutilement ses travaux au public, tous les besoins sont satisfaits; ainsi sa famille est une famille surabondante'.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ AD Marne I J 38 No. 10.

¹²⁹ Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420.

malgré eux' whose begging was ultimately 'excusable' in the opinion of nearly all the Châlons essayists because it stemmed not from any moral failure on the part of the poor but rather from the inability of the social and economic structure to accommodate so many landless or near landless labourers.

In essay after essay these authors reminded their readers that if one bothered to cast more than a disdainful glance at the beggar whom society condemned to prisons one would discover not brigands who had consciously embarked upon a life of crime but rather unskilled or, increasingly, skilled workers, their wives, widows or children, for whom the current 'disette du travail' had left little economic alternative but public charity or begging.¹³⁰ They testify to personal observation or acquaintance with poor families who had struggled for years against hunger and misery only eventually to succumb to it. Only when these families had nothing left to sell would they turn to begging as their last and most

¹³⁰ Duperron, Les Moyens de détruire la Mendicité en rendant les mendiants utiles à l'Etat sans les rendre malheureux. Prix proposé par l'Académie des sciences, belles lettres et arts de Châlons-sur-Marne pour l'année 1777. Discours prononcé à l'Académie royale des sciences tendant à perfectionner les fabriques en soie, à prévenir la mendicité dans le royaume, etc. (Geneva - Paris, d'Houry, 1778). The essayist Montlinot, in a report prepared a decade after his Châlons essay, provides pertinent data on the inmates of the dépôt at Soissons which he directed. He notes that in 1786 the breakdown of those in the Soissons dépôt was as follows: 854 total. Of that number 304 were women, children and the insane of both sexes; 550 were men. Of the 550, 256 declared a trade and 294 claimed to be unemployed day labourers. He notes, as well, that wool carders and spinners were particularly numerous and ventures that this was a result of the slowdown in manufacturing that year. Montlinot considered the trades of tailor, shoemaker, weaver and wigmaker the most vagabond trades and notes that those plying them were often out of work. There were 208 inmates whom Montlinot considered dangerous and a scourge to society. Montlinot, L'État actuel du dépôt de Soissons, précédé d'un essai sur la Mendicité (Soissons, 1789).

Research by Thomas Adams on the dépôt at Rennes, 'An Approach to the Problem of Begging in Eighteenth-Century France: The Dépôts de Mendicité' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, U. Wisconsin, 1972) and by Marie-Édith Brejon de Lavergnée, 'Le Dépôt de Mendicité d'Ostende à Châlons-sur-Marne à la fin du XVIII^e siècle' (Mémoire pour le DES de Droit public, Université de Reims, 1976) confirms this picture.

degrading recourse. 'Avoüons à l'honneur de ces hommes infortunés', testified a judge from Castillon sur Dordogne,

qu'ils luttent de toutes leurs forces contre la misère et la faim. La mendicité est une tâche qui les avilit [...]. On les voit porter au marché voisin leurs meubles, leur linge et acheter du pain du produit de cette vente. C'est lorsqu'ils n'ont plus rien qu'ils souscrivent à l'infamie.¹³¹

What, then was their offence? 'Le malheur d'être nés sans richesses', another essayist remarked acidly.¹³² In the view of the majority of the Châlons essayists, those concerned with order often had found it 'plus simple et moins coûteux de publier des défenses aux mendiants de se montrer'.¹³³ Prohibitions against public begging did nothing, however, to assuage the poor man's misery. And, if they did manage to keep him off the roads and away from the public eye, the ultimate effect of such laws was to 'condamner le pauvre à périr dans le silence et l'obscurité de sa chaumière'.¹³⁴ Yet, it was as reasonable to forbid desperately hungry unemployed people to beg, still another essayist remarked, as it was to 'leur défendre de manger et faire le procès à la nature qui leur a donné un estomac'.¹³⁵

Against those who defied the law, daring to 'sortir de leurs retraites', society inflicted severe penalties -- incarcerating the unemployed in dépôts de mendicité, workhouse prisons, which the Abbé Montlinot, an essayist and himself soon to be appointed director of Necker's model dépôt at Soissons, described as 'des repaires infects' where

¹³¹ AD Marne I J 41 No. 87.

¹³² Ad Marne I J 38 No. 10.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ AD Marne I J 40 No. 66. The essayist is Montlinot.

¹³⁵ AD Marne I J 38 No. 10.

the poor were 'chassés semblables à des troupeaux de bêtes fauves'.¹³⁶ Montlinot is here voicing the expressed sentiment of more than a third of his fellow essayists with regard to the dépôts de mendicité which had first been created by the Crown in 1767, abolished by Turgot, and then reinstituted under Necker. More than nine-tenths of the essayists condemned exclusively repressive laws against the poor which ignored the circumstances of their poverty. The curé Duverger remarks that for the courts to condemn the unemployed to dépôts because they had been forced by need to beg their living was to 'confondre les malheureux avec les coupables: c'est mettre de niveau la pauvreté et le crime'.¹³⁷ Again and again the poor housed in the dépôts are described as 'infortunés [...] dont la misère seul fait le crime'.¹³⁸ What emerges as the most basic premise of the Châlons essayists was that, contrary to previous government legislation, poverty was not a crime and should not be treated as such.¹³⁹ The following statement, by the Parisian Benedictine Dom Pierre Paul, on the dépôts de mendicité illustrates the essayists' attitude toward the government's latest attempt to repress the poor.

Peut-on voir un système plus ridicule, plus insuffisant, plus inhumain, plus à charge même à l'Etat. D'ailleurs les mendiants auront toujours à dire que ne nous donne-t-on du travail pour nous faire vivre. N'en trouvant point sommes nous criminels de demander de quoi satisfaire à nos besoins les plus pressants? Méritons nous pour cela de perdre la liberté?

¹³⁶ AD Marne I J 40 No. 66. Not only was Montlinot director of the model dépôt at Soissons; he had also contributed the article 'dépôt de mendicité' to the Encyclopédie méthodique. Dictionnaire de l'Économie politique et diplomatique, 2 vols (Paris, 1786-8) II, p. 71, and so was something of an expert on the subject.

¹³⁷ AD Marne I J 39 No. 25.

¹³⁸ AD Marne I J 38 No. 8 and I J 42 No. 113.

¹³⁹ For especially good statements of this idea see AD Marne I J 38 No. 10, I J 39 No. 48, I J 40 Nos. 50 and 69 and I J 41 Nos. 75 and 96.

The essayists' answer to this question was a resounding 'non'. Not the unemployed beggar but 'les dépôts consacrés pour les mendiants' were in their view 'condamnables'.¹⁴⁰

As things stood, judged the essayist lawyer Jean-Joseph Bertin of Valenciennes, the law presented the destitute Frenchmen with the ludicrous choice of begging his living or dying a law-abiding Frenchman.

Condamné à périr faute de secours nécessaires pour soutenir ses jours [...] un homme exposé entre l'alternative de mourir innocent ou de vivre coupable n'a pas longtemps à délibérer pour [...] rejeter avec horreur une innocence dont il doit être la victime.¹⁴¹

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLARIZATION AND POPULAR DISCONTENT

Ultimately, these essayists insisted, neither the begging nor the sporadic criminality of the absolutely indigent posed the most serious threat to the

¹⁴⁰ AD Marne I J 40 No. 69. Dom Pierre Paul was a Benedictine priest and a member of the Congrégation de St Maur, St German des Près, Paris. Montlinot, in his Essai sur la mendicité (p. 9) reiterated the Benedictine's criticism of the government's policy and condemned its refusal to recognize that the root cause of begging was the levels of unemployment that made it impossible for the poor man to find work. Legislation forcing him to return home and to work within a delay of fifteen days (prescribed by the ordonnance of 27 July 1777) were, in his view, worthy only of ridicule had they not such catastrophic consequences for the unemployed poor. 'Comme si le gouvernement avait créé dans le moment des travaux particuliers analogues à la force, aux talents de chaque individu; comme si on avait ouvert de nouveaux champs à la culture, des ateliers dans tous les genres d'industrie; comme si enfin un homme, à la volonté de l'administration, pouvait être dans le délai de quinze jours tisserand ou cordonnier'. Quoted in Bloch, L'Assistance et l'État, p. 220, note 5.

¹⁴¹ AD Marne I J 38 No. 8. The essayists rejected exclusively repressive measures against the desperate poor who sometimes begged or stole to eat. As we shall see, they strongly advocated that the honest indigent without work be given aid or employment so that he or she could buy bread.

The essayists did not ignore the serious threat to social order posed by habitual criminal beggars, but emphasized that it was the honest but unemployed beggar and not the criminal beggar who was the subject of the academy's concern. Montlinot writes: 'Il n'est question ici que des pauvres plongés dans le besoin par le cherté de vivres, le défaut du travail, ou des malheurs imprévus. Je restreins mon sujet aux mendiants valides et c'est je crois l'esprit du programme de l'académie.' AD Marne I J 40 No. 66. Emphasis added.

social order. Far more serious in the minds of these essayists was the discontent they saw everywhere about them among ordinary Frenchmen. France's labouring population was both 'la portion la plus nombreuse des citoyens' and the class 'la plus utile de l'état considéré économiquement'; and, yet, given existing trends, they were also 'les sujets le plus exposés à la mendicité'.¹⁴² Taxes and tithes, corvées, militia service, seigneurial dues and land rents left the most fortunate among the labouring classes with little more than their daily bread and 'une perspective de travaux pénibles qui se renouvellent dans toutes les saisons et ne doivent finir qu'avec la vie'.¹⁴³ Theirs was at best 'une manière de vivre constamment laborieuse' yet, a Parisian noted, absolutely 'sans espoir de parvenir à se donner ce qu'on appelle un mieux-être'.¹⁴⁴

No matter whether he was a paid labourer, a share-cropping tenant or a small farmer, the man who in France tilled the soil was always 'tristement courbé vers la terre', labouring 'à regret parce qu'il la moissonnera pour autrui'.¹⁴⁵ No matter how hard he worked it was always someone else -- most often 'le riche propriétaire, tranquille dans sa maison' -- who enjoyed 'tous les agrémens de la société et [...] un bien du quel', an essayist noted, 'il n'a peut être pas eu la moindre part'.¹⁴⁶ On this point the essayists offered but slight variations on a single theme: the relationship between rich and poor, propertied and unpropertied was for them quite obviously a relationship of power and

¹⁴² AD Marne I J 49 No. 43, Aleton, and I J 40 No. 78, Roussel de la Berardière.

¹⁴³ AD Marne I J 49 No. 38.

¹⁴⁴ Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 864.

¹⁴⁵ Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420.

¹⁴⁶ Gosselin, Réflexions d'un Citoyen, p. 68.

exploitation: 'Tout l'avantage est d'un côté et toute la charge de l'autre; tout le bénéfice pour le fort, toute la peine pour le foible'.¹⁴⁷ While the propertied or rich employer 'retire tout le profit [...] sans y contribuer rien', society's working members were forced by their need to acquiesce to 'un contrat involontaire' whereby 'ils le nourrissent, le logent, le protègent, en un mot, lui fournissent ce dont il a besoin'.¹⁴⁸

Demographic growth and the trend towards consolidation of property into large estates and the emergence of a market economy had created a continually enlarging class of men obliged to live principally if not wholly from wages. Relations between these labouring poor and their employers in the propertied and entrepreneurial classes had lost their human aspect and become based ever more explicitly upon a nexus of money and power. Viewed objectively, the ethic of this new society seemed to the essayists as simple as it was cruel: 'l'argent est compté pour tout, l'homme pour rien'.¹⁴⁹ In his essay for the Academy the director of the hospital at Vitry-le-François, who daily dealt with his town's sick and

¹⁴⁷ Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420, I, 35.

¹⁴⁸ AD Marne I J 41 No. 78.

¹⁴⁹ Lambert, Précis de vues générales en faveur de ceux qui n'ont rien (Lons-le-Saunier, 1789), p. 5. Early in this pamphlet Lambert notes the events surrounding its composition: 'les Provinces vont s'occuper de la rédaction des cahiers'. Lambert took as 'devise' for his pamphlet a quotation from the memoir on begging of the Châlons Academy: 'Allez au devant du Pauvre, faites-lui trouver dans sa maison le travail, le nécessaire; & vous n'aurez plus besoin ni de loix, ni de chaînes pour réprimer la mendicité'. (Memoire de l'Acad. de Châlons, 2ed, p. 72). Lambert's begging memoir, which previous historians have ignored, exists only in extract from a supplement found in AD Marne I J 41, and from references to it and quotations from it in Malvaux's résumé of the competing memoirs. We know how important the Academy's contest and the views it exposed was to Lambert from a letter he wrote to the Academy 26 March 1779 (AD Marne I J 208); we also know that when he wrote to the Academy he had already been to its publisher in Paris, Lalain, in the rue Saint Jacques, to try to see a copy of the published les Moyens de détruire la mendicité en France.

distressed, confirmed this view, adding that France now seemed to be peopled by two classes of men the poorest of whom were so dehumanized in the eyes of the rich as to be scarcely recognizable. 'Il y a longtemps [...] les riches et les pauvres' had become 'deux classes d'hommes tout à fait étrangers les uns aux autres. [...] Vous diriez à les voir [...] qu'ils n'auroient de commun que la figure extérieure'.¹⁵⁰

The division of society into economically and socially antagonistic groups -- rich and poor, propertied and unpropertied, leisured and labouring -- had for the Châlons essayists superseded the more traditional division into the society of orders. The essayists' more purely economic conceptualization of social relations was consistent with their contention that their generation and that of their parents and grandparents had witnessed both the transformation of economic relations from a mediated to a market economy and a realignment of social relations. This new economic and social order was bringing the rich and propertied of all three orders into a position of privileged power over those who, dependent upon their dictates and those of a competitive market, composed the nation's vast class of labouring poor.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Ad Marne I J 41 No. 111.

¹⁵¹ The use of the rich/poor dichotomy is extremely common among the essayists. Like Arthur Young, they describe a France in which there are few gradations between two pronounced extremes of rich and poor. For particularly good examples of this division, the reader is referred to AD Marne I J 39 No. 43, I J 40 Nos 66 and 70, I J 42 Nos 111 and 113, and I J 49 Nos 30, 43 and 49. One of the most explicit statements of a division of society drawn along purely economic lines was made by the essayist Lambert, a competitor who like Montlinot and Boncerf would one day become a member of the revolutionary Comité de Mendicité. Lambert wrote: 'La division de la société en trois Ordres distincts et séparés peut donc, sans conséquence, subsister comme auparavant, pourvu toutefois qu'on ne se permette pas de perdre de vue qu'il n'y a au fond que deux classes des citoyens, les propriétaires et les non-propriétaires; et qu'on donne aux conséquences sérieuses qui découle de cette dernière division, tout autrement essentielle que l'autre, la juste attention que l'humanité réclame pour elle.' Précis de vues générales, p. 6.

Recognition of emerging economic realities forced the essayists to re-examine social values and the privileges and power that were the accoutrements of land and wealth in Old Regime society. 'Nos préjugés trompeurs par un renversement des principes', complained a competitor from St Linien, 'ne défèrent la considération et la jouissance qu'à un homme qui vit dans le désœuvrement et l'oisiveté, et d'autre part le mépris à ceux qui exercent des professions utiles'.¹⁵² From the perspective of social utility, society's good-for-nothing were not her poor -- these essayists ventured -- but rather those whom it most esteemed. 'Fiers de ces avantages de la fortune et du sang qu'ils ne tiennent que du hasard, et que ne sont dus, l'un qu'à leurs ancêtres, l'autre qu'à d'heureuses circonstances, souvent même à des moyens honteux', the new elite of rich and noble acted as if they were 'formés d'un limon plus précieux que le reste des hommes'.¹⁵³ Daring to 'mépriser, regarder comme avilissante la condition' which the essayists one after another called 'la plus noble et la plus respectable', men who 'ne sont propres qu'à la consommation' thus treated those who were 'véritablement créateurs' as 'presque pas des hommes'.¹⁵⁴

However, contrary to what those in elite society seemed to believe, the Châlons essayists warned that the implications of a social economy in which 'les trois quarts au moins de l'espèce humaine' were condemned by 'la loi du plus fort [...] au service du reste' had begun to penetrate the consciousness of labouring Frenchmen. 'L'homme de la campagne', admonished

¹⁵² Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 867.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 866. The laboureur Fequant remarked with both irony and bitterness: 'En la police de France nous avons tant rabaissez voire opprimer [...] les laboureurs et autres gens de peine [...] qu'il y a sujet de s'émerveller comment il se trouve des laboureurs pour nous nourrir'. AD Marne I J 49 No. 23.

the parish priest Aleton, 'sent l'abaissement où on le réduit',¹⁵⁵ and had begun to realize that his assigned lot in French social and economic life was what the village doctor Trioson called 'un état d'opretien et de souffrance'.¹⁵⁶ It was therefore foolish, the essayists warned, for those who oppressed them to believe 'le Peuple travailleur ou assez mauvais pour le mériter ou assez stupide pour n'en rien sentir'.¹⁵⁷

Why, an essayist asked rhetorically, 'en voyant régner partout l'injustice' of a system based on property and privilege, should a man without either 'observer la justice?' Rather, those who felt themselves protected by these laws should abandon any illusion they might have about the attachment of the poor man to their laws and institutions: 'Qu'on ne pense pas qu'il soit plus attaché aux loix de la société dans laquelle il vit, quand il éprouve si souvent qu'elles sont toutes faites contre lui. C'est pourquoi dès qu'il croit pouvoir les violer impunément, il ne manque presque jamais de le faire.'¹⁵⁸ Looking about him in the towns and villages which brought him within sight of those who lived in privileged ease, he observed 'avec envie l'aisance des riches et avec indignation le luxe et la magnificence des grands et des princes'.¹⁵⁹ Thus, nurturing 'dans le fond de son âme un dépit secret' against 'ces hommes si fiers de [leurs] dignités [...] crédit [...] et opulence' and in 'comparant sa misère à leur abondance', even the most law-abiding labourer might, cautioned the author of the begging contest's winning essay, begin to

¹⁵⁵ AD Marne I J 49 No. 43.

¹⁵⁶ AD Marne I J 49 No. 19.

¹⁵⁷ AD Marne I J 49 No. 43.

¹⁵⁸ Gosselin, Réflexions d'un citoyen, p. 12.

¹⁵⁹ AD Marne I J 42 No. 114. This statement is taken from the essay by Clouet of Verdun who won the academy's prize for the competition on begging.

'regard[er] leur superflu comme un bien qui lui appartient'.¹⁶⁰ If he then continued to labour, respecting the property and laws of 'un adversaire qu'il regarde comme l'auteur de tous ses malheurs', it was -- the director of the hospital at Vitry warned -- 'par la pure crainte du châtement'.¹⁶¹

Growing numbers of the poor were, in the estimation of these essayists, 'prêts à éluder ou transgresser [...] la loi'.¹⁶² 'Depuis longtemps', wrote the Abbeville lawyer Traulle, 'ils gémissaient; leurs cris deviennent plus perçans et leurs douleurs plus vives'.¹⁶³ And still the rich and powerful continued to 'aggraver encore une injustice dont leur suites pourroient devenir si terrible'.¹⁶⁴ Denying what the Châlons essayists regarded as obvious -- that 'la disproportion immense qu'il y a aujourd'hui dans les fortunes' was 'la cause principale de tous les désordres qui règnent dans la société',¹⁶⁵ -- those in positions of power were, in their view, ignoring the ominous warnings signalled by begging and criminality. The Châlons essays therefore come in urgent warning to the complacent that the begging and criminality they now deplored could one day erupt into large-scale civil disorder if obvious social and economic evils were not remedied. The threat was real, they

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ AD Marne I J 42 No. 111.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ AD Marne I J 49 No. 5.

¹⁶⁴ An unidentified competitor cited in the edition of 1780 of the Academy's published resumé of the begging contest essays, Les Moyens de détruire la mendicité en France.

¹⁶⁵ AD Marne I J 39 No. 43. The author of this essay identified himself as M de Vareilles, 'ancien controlleur de la Maison du feu M^{me} de La Dauphine et celle de Madame la Comtesse de Provence'. He competed in the contests of 1776 and 1778.

insisted. To ignore it and continue to exploit people who had begun to recognize their oppression was to court disaster.

Pour l'intérêt même des grands et la sûreté des riches craignons que le Peuple ne soit tenté de rétablir l'égalité primitive de la nature par les moyens violens qui renverseroient le corps social.¹⁶⁶

The essayists' warning was directed at the rich and powerful -- not only because they were the only ones who could avert disorder by permitting structural reform but also because it was they (as much or more than the poor) who were in the essayists' opinion responsible for social unrest.

Méchanceté étant tout à la fois active et passive, parce qu'elle n'est pas moindre dans l'oppresseur que dans l'opprimé, elle corrompt tout la corps de la société, et dénature le caractère national dans ses deux extrêmes.¹⁶⁷

The author of this passage, written in 1782, was no obscure provincial. It was Clicquot de Blervache, son of a Reims wool merchant and manufacturer who had risen to become a national Inspector General of Commerce and Manufacturing. His warning, to those whom might be regarded as his peers, was clear and resonant.

O vous qui jouissez dans l'opulence des fruits du travail du Peuple, descendez un moment jusqu'à lui; seriez vous meilleurs à sa place [...] Vous leurs reprochez leur improbité! Vous les avez dépouillés du fonds et des fruits! Vous les avez réduits à l'indigence!¹⁶⁸

The central theme in this, as in many other accusatory admonitions the essayists directed at elite society, was that the social unrest, begging

¹⁶⁶ Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. Gosselin concurred with Clicquot's assessment. 'Si le travail est pour l'homme d'une nécessité indispensable, il faut aussi qu'il ait l'espérance de pouvoir en retirer le fruit, sans quoi il se livrera au brigandage, ou à la mendicité. O vous qui que vous soyez, Princes de la terre, qui exercez sur nous un empire absolu, gardez-vous d'exposer vos sujets à cette cruelle alternative. Non seulement vous vous rendriez complices des crimes qui se commettraient; mais tôt ou tard le mal en retomberoit sur vos têtes.' Réflexions d'un Citoyen, pp. 17-18.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

and criminality that were plaguing France were the result of the economic exploitation of the majority by the minority of privileged Frenchmen from all three estates who had gradually gained control of both the means and the fruits of production. According to this view, popular discontent could be traced directly to the economic dependence of the labouring poor upon men whose wealth was, in fact, the fruit of the working man's labour and who added insult to injury by disdaining all manual work and those who performed it. 'Si vous [les riches] la laissez subsister' (the double tyranny of social and economic affliction), another essayist warned, 'vous fomentez et éternisez l'aliénation des coeurs'.¹⁶⁹

Riches et grands de la terre. Ne verrez-vous jamais que le pauvre dans son désespoir revomit sur vous mêmes toutes les infamies que vous lui avez fait avaler malgré lui. Sa bile, irritée par la fureur où vous l'avez jeté lui fait exhiler et refluer sur vous toute la malice que vous avez fait entrer dans son âme déjà irritée.¹⁷⁰

Few were better placed than this Versailles choirmaster to view in such close proximity the enormous disparity between princely wealth and peasant poverty. Yet, nearly all the essayists shared his conviction that the misery and discontent of the labouring poor could be mitigated only if the Crown, overriding powerful private interest, instituted significant structural reform of the French social economy.

'Le gouvernement a fait quelques pas vers le bien',¹⁷¹ an unidentified essayist noted, mentioning as did so many of his fellow essayists, recent royal edicts that indicated a reformist approach to the abuses of seigneurial and ecclesiastical property and the privileges of the

¹⁶⁹ AD Marne I J 42 No. 111.

¹⁷⁰ AD Marne I J 39 No. 29.

¹⁷¹ AD Marne I J 41 No. 98.

guilds. Among other reforms, the essayists cited edicts eliminating serfdom on the royal domain, expelling the Jesuits and appropriating their property and that of several moribund religious orders, and administrative measures to create public works projects (under the aegis of compagnies des pionniers or ateliers de charité) and to free rural Frenchmen to engage in textile manufacturing.¹⁷² Uppermost in the minds of many were Turgot's edicts, particularly the reform of the corvée which had been intended, they believed, to reduce the corvée's burden on the labouring classes by forcing the propertied from all estates to contribute to it. The essayists specifically cited -- some even quoted verbatim -- Louis XVI's Turgot-prepared preamble to this edict¹⁷³ as evidence of Louis XVI's zeal not only to 'soulager son peuple' by freeing them from forced unpaid labour but also to impose 'une taxe proportionnée aux propriétés' which, they noted, could well signal the beginning of a more general redistribution of fiscal dues.¹⁷⁴

The essayists are particularly sensitive to the administrative initiatives of the royal intendants who, acting in the name of the

¹⁷² For the essayists' assessment of the government's intent in instituting these and related reforms directly or indirectly beneficial to the labouring classes see AD Marne I J 38 Nos 3, 11 and 12; I J 39 Nos. 37, 44, and 47; I J 40 Nos 58, 70 and 71; I J 41 Nos 90, 98 and 100 and I J 49 Nos 23, 24 and 33. See also Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420 and Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MSS 866 and 1275.

¹⁷³ AD Marne I J 40 No. 70 and I J 49 No. 23.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. The essayists make frequent reference to the pledges contained in the preambles in recent legislation. The preamble was consciously intended as an instrument of public education, according to the testimony of the intendant of Alsace, La Galaizière: 'Les préambules de toutes nos lois modernes renferment leurs motifs; les opérations méditées [...] ne sont tentées qu'après avoir reçu l'assentiment général'. Procès verbal des séances de l'Assemblée provinciale d'Alsace, BN LK 15/3, cited by Ardascheff, Les Intendants de province sous Louis XVI, traduit par L. Jousserandot. (Paris, Felix Alcan, 1909), p. 204. Necker shared a similar understanding of the role of the preambles in educating the public. See his introduction to De l'Administration des finances (1784), lxx-lxxi.

sovereign, demonstrated throughout the provinces the concern for France's common people that Louis XVI had evidenced in his own widely publicized acts of kindness toward the poor in and around Versailles.¹⁷⁵ The intendants of Lyon, Champagne, Bordeaux, Montpellier, Orléans and La Rochelle were singled out in the Châlons essays for particular praise and were commended for their consistent efforts to protect the people not only from the effects of unrestrained privilege but also, increasingly, from the effects of an unregulated market economy. The essayists praise the royal intendants for their efforts to relieve the poor of their provinces through bureaux and ateliers de charité in the towns and countryside, through the distribution of medicine, tools and seed or through the provisioning of grain or supervising the prices at which it was sold.¹⁷⁶ Responding immediately to local need because, in the words of an essayist from Berry, 'ils connoissent mieux les misères par la connoissance des départements que le Roy leur a confiés',¹⁷⁷ the royal intendants gave this public proof

¹⁷⁵ 'Louis XVI pendant le rigoureux hyver de 1775', an essayist wrote in 1776, 'alloit lui même déguisé visiter les pauvres des environs de Versailles afin de leur donner tous les secours dont ils avoient besoin.' AD Marne I J 42 No. 123. Louis XVI had reason to be concerned about the hordes of beggars around Paris and Versailles. Alarmed at their rising numbers, the King wrote a letter in July of 1777 to the minister of the royal household, Amelot, telling him to ask the lieutenant general of police and the intendant of Paris for memoirs on the establishment of ateliers de charité for the able-bodied poor and on parish and hospital care for the sick. For further discussion of Louis XVI's initiatives with regard to poor relief during the administrations of Turgot and Necker see Thomas Adams, 'An Approach to the Problem of Begging in Eighteenth Century France', particularly chapters 11 and 12.

¹⁷⁶ AD Marne I J 41 Nos 89 and 100 and I J 42 No. 112.

¹⁷⁷ AD Marne I J 49 No. 37. The essayist continues: 'Le Roy (et la Reine) qui ne respire que le bonheur du peuple que Dieu leur a donné à gouverner ne peuvent voir tout ce qui passe dans leur royaume qui est s'y étendue [...]. Ils se rapportent à l'honneur à la probité de [...] tous leurs intendants de province [...]. Combien ces messieurs, les intendants, aujourd'hui donne[nt] les preuves de leur tendresse pour soulager les pauvres'.

of Louis XVI's resolve to honour his pledge to 'soulager son peuple et de s'en faire aimer'.¹⁷⁸

Yet, each time that the King attempted to legislate reforms that would alleviate the burdens borne by the labouring poor, his efforts and those of his reforming ministers were foiled by the wealthy and the powerful. 'Le riche, accoutumé à se dire "je suis tout"', accused Barbe de la Barthe, 's'élèv[e] avec force contre des loix qui lui diroient que le pauvre est citoyen [...]. Le luxe s'effraye au seul mot de réforme'.¹⁷⁹ With their own interests and not the interests of their sovereign or his people at heart, powerful men at court and in the courts deceived the king about the needs and the mood of his people, whispering in his ear 'tout va bien' in order to cover the anguished cry of a nation which, the laboureur Fequant declared, looked to the Crown for protection.¹⁸⁰ With self-interested sermons about the utility of poverty, of high taxes and of a free market in commodities and labour, men whom the essayists described as 'ces avides financiers', 'ces laches partisans du despotisme', 'ces hommes inhumains', 'prétendent que le peuple ne travaille qu'autant qu'il est chargé d'impôts' and 'répètent que le peuple n'est vraiment soumis que quand il est réduit à l'état le plus misérable'.¹⁸¹ And, yet, when all the charges weighing down upon a poor

¹⁷⁸ AD Marne I J 49 No. 23.

¹⁷⁹ AD Marne I J 41 No. 87.

¹⁸⁰ AD Marne I J 49 No. 23. 'Les oreilles des princes sont simples et aisées à décevoir, cars ils estiment que les autres ne voudroient mentir, ni qu'ils le feroient: les flatteurs leur disent que tout va bien, et que leur peuple n'a charge qu'il ne porte bien, et que encore le porteroit-il plus grande; le pauvre peuple qui meurt de faim et de malaise en l'amertume de son âme crie à Dieu vengeance.'

¹⁸¹ Gosselin, Réflexions d'un citoyen, p. 18 and AD Marne I J 39 No. 29. The essayists consistently denounce the utility of poverty/taxes argument with warnings that such policies were both economically and politically irrational and dangerous. Two further examples illustrate this

family finally drove it under, these same men counselled the King: 'il faut punir le mendiant; ne donnez point de secours à la canaille et vous en forcerez à travailler. Il faut que le peuple souffre pour que l'État soit prospère.'¹⁸²

The political and economic irrationality of these policies was obvious to the essayists and so, after exposing them before their sovereign in their Châlons essays, they entreat Louis XVI to consider seriously whether it was on the poor who laboured or on the rich who disdained all work that he could reasonably depend. 'Qui dans ces tems désastreux sauva la patrie?' an essayist queried and then answered. 'Ce ne fut jamais ni les riches, ni les grands. Toujours ils présentèrent des privilèges pour s'exempter de donner leur argent. Ce furent les peuples qui secoururent l'État dans tous les temps.'¹⁸³

National prosperity or decline ultimately lay, according to these essayists, not with the propertied and privileged who seemingly controlled the land and its produce but rather with the labouring classes who 'par leur nombre et par le genre de leurs travaux constituent la force et le

point: 'Croire qu'il fallut forcer le peuple par les impôts à travailler à la terre pour donner à l'état le produit de la seule industrie dont il est capable, ce seroit une erreur qui ne pourroit venir que d'une fausse politique et qui n'auroit pour but que de rendre puissant le Prince ou le corps qui gouverne, aux dépens de tout le reste du Peuple.' AD Marne I J 49 No. 23. 'Loin d'ici ces politiques cruels qui par une odieuse prévoyance veulent que le paysan soit écrasé sous le poids des impôts, de crainte que la paresse ne succède chez lui à la pauvreté.' Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 866.

¹⁸² AD Marne I J 39 No. 29. Rabigot completed his account of the cruel counsel of those who themselves refused to pay taxes with this comment: 'Tel est le langage de certains hommes qui sans le crime seroient eux-mêmes sans pain et quoiqu'ils regorge de bien et qu'ils nagent dans la volupté, ils ne laissent pas de voir de sang froid périr leurs proches, sans leur donner le moindre secours.'

¹⁸³ Ibid.

nerf de l'État'.¹⁸⁴ In conscious contrast to those who argued that either bullion or the land was the true source of national wealth, these essayists maintain that neither would be important without the addition of human labour.

L'argent ne fait rien, ne produit rien; il n'est que le signe des choses & les choses ne sont produites que par le travail des hommes. Ce n'est donc pas l'argent mais les hommes qui font la force et le nerf des états.¹⁸⁵

To ignore the legitimate needs of the productive classes and to prevent them from enjoying all but the most necessary fruits of their labour was, they warn their young king, an invitation to fiscal, economic and social disaster.

'Ne perdez jamais de vue cette vérité importante', Clicquot de Blervache counselled his sovereign, 'que c'est le peuple qui, par ses consommations et par ses travaux, fournit à l'Etat la plus grande partie de ses revenus'.¹⁸⁶ It was, reminded another essayist, 'des laboureurs et les ouvriers mécaniques' -- and not the rich and noble whom the Crown favoured with privilege -- 'qui donnent à la société leurs denrées et leurs travaux'. It was they -- and not 'la partie oisive de ses sujets' -- who 'fournissent les bras aux généraux comme à l'agriculture' and it was therefore their welfare above all others that the Crown should intervene to protect.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ AD Marne I J 41 No. 78.

¹⁸⁵ Lambert, Cahier des Pauvres, 12.

¹⁸⁶ Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420.

¹⁸⁷ AD Marne I J 40 No. 98. The unidentified essayist who wrote this essay considered conflict inevitable if the Crown continued to favour its idle subjects over the labouring classes. 'Tant que l'ordre moral et l'ordre physique seront en contradiction dans la politique, on ne pourra jamais se flatter d'atteindre le but d'une sage administration; toutes ses parties seront nécessairement discordantes dès que le monarque, juge naturel de ce qui convient à ses peuples, ne réglera point ses affections sur les services personnels rendus à la société; tant qu'assujetti à la

Collectively 'la portion la plus utile des citoyens', the labouring poor were nevertheless individually 'chacun en particulier plus foible que les autres citoyens. C'est donc,' Roussel de la Berardiére argued, 'sur elle que le Gouvernement doit particulièrement et essentiellement veiller. C'est à elle qu'il doit ses plus précieuses faveurs afin de la préserver du danger de tomber dans l'indigence dont elle est plus voisine que les autres'.¹⁸⁸ Only in promoting the welfare of the productive classes, the lawyer Aubert added, could the Crown secure both the throne and the power and prosperity of the state. 'C'est dans cet état qu'ils font la richesse et la puissance du souverain'.¹⁸⁹ The Crown, they counsel, should make the welfare of the people -- not gold or the glory of war¹⁹⁰ -- the major priority of government in realistic recognition that to 'continuer à délaissier aussi cruellement qu'on l'a fait jusqu'ici les hommes laborieux et utiles' would ultimately 'saper l'édifice social par son fondement'. The danger, they felt, was clear: 'il n'est point de securité raisonnable dans un ordre de choses où le pauvre continueroit d'être compté pour rien'.¹⁹¹

façon de penser des siècles qui l'ont précédé il préférera la partie oisive de ses sujets à la partie labourieuse'.

¹⁸⁸ AD Marne I J 41 No. 78.

¹⁸⁹ AD Marne I J 41 No. 78.

¹⁹⁰ The essayists were well aware that this would require a drastic departure from the foreign policies of previous French kings. Montlinot wrote disparagingly of France's Sun King: 'Louis XIV dont la flatterie encensa presque toutes les actions, enivré de gloire préférait presque toujours la splendeur du trône au salut des peuples'. AD Marne I J 40 No. 66. And the canon of Troyes, S.-P. Torchet remarked: 'des victoires, des conquestes qui reculeroient nos frontieres, coûteroient à la nation beaucoup de sang, l'épuisement du Trésor Royal, et celui des Peuples, et ne seroient peut être pas plus avantageuses à notre Auguste Monarque que cette importante réforme [...] l'anéantissement de la mendicité dans le royaume'. AD Marne I J 41 No. 88.

¹⁹¹ AD Marne I J 41 No. 78.

V

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFORM

What reforms did the Châlons essayists petition their king to make? A careful coding and counting of their suggestions reveals, once again, an astonishing consensus of opinion among the essayists with regard to both the direction and the magnitude of fundamental reform. As Table VI (p. 269) indicates, 140 (or 92%) of all the essayists advocated some form of direct government intervention in the economic life of the nation. Of the remaining twelve essayists, six favoured relief measures only -- recommending either aid to the ill, old or very young or government supervision of subsistence. The six others advocated no substantive reform at all. A typical comment from one of these is the 'boot-straps/self-help' maxim of Pierre-Noel Dubois: 'Le bien être des laboureurs, journaliers, gens de peine et de leurs femmes et de leurs enfants ne dépend que d'eux mêmes.'¹ Or, in contrast, the utopian naïvety of the Abbé Cauchois from Rouen who implored: 'Vous heureux du monde, vous riches de la terre. Adoptez les pauvres familles!'²

But the rest of the essayists -- 140 out of 152 -- advocated substantive measures, to be undertaken by the Crown, to provide both short-term relief and long-term structural reform. This fact alone demonstrates that the essayists' conception of the poor man and his problems was much broader than that of most 'enlightened' writers in the period and underscores their conviction that society should seek not only to rid

¹ AD Marne I J 49 No. 1. Dubois identified himself in correspondence as 'ancien conseiller au Conseil supérieur du Sénégal, coste d'Affrique'.

² AD Marne I J 49 No. 40.

itself of paupers but also to redress the grievances of a labouring population condemned to chronic poverty and haunted by destitution. Previous attempts to deal with the problem -- whether undertaken by Church or State -- had consistently and, in the near-unanimous view of these essayists, inevitably failed to achieve their objective precisely because they had failed to do more than provide stop-gap measures to control the hands-out or hands-up survival tactics of the nation's most importunate poor. 'Jusqu'ici', wrote Romans de Coppier, a cleric of Rouen who received a 4th honourable mention in the competition on begging, 'la France s'est contenté de tendre la main à ceux qui tombent dans l'abîme de la misère. J'estime', he added, unwittingly summarizing the view of most of his fellow essayists, 'qu'il vaut encore mieux construire un pont pour faire passer sûrement le précipice'.³

The sovereign would accomplish this not by following the laissez-faire, laissez-passer dictates of those who would submit all men to the unfair competition of an absolutely free market in land, labour and commodities, but rather by intervening directly to 'garantir à tout homme laborieux et utile le droit qu'il a à son existence' and 'l'espérance [de] pouvoir retirer le fruit de son travail'.⁴ Given the inhumanity and the illogicality of merely repressive measures against the poor in dépôts, the total inadequacy of parish priests, hospitals and local authorities to meet the needs of even local poor and, more serious still, the sheer number of those seemingly unable to feed their families in a market economy, these essayists turned as one man to the Crown to solve a problem that was so great as to be completely beyond their means -- almost beyond their comprehension. The only solution that they could practically envisage

³ AD Marne I J 42 No. 113.

⁴ Lambert, Au Roi, p. 5 and Gosselin, Réflexions d'un Citoyen, p. 13.

would involve, to a greater or lesser degree, centralized supervision of the social economy.

Viewed from a twentieth-century perspective, the programme of reforms suggested by the essayists can be divided, as has been done in Tables IV and VI, into two groups: relief measures that would help poor families to survive and reform measures that would enable them to earn enough to live. In the discussion that follows the essayists' suggested reforms will be grouped into four categories: first, those dealing with the problem of un- or under-employment; second, those advocating a redistribution of the use or ownership of property; third, those in support of a redistribution of the tax burden and/or a royal reduction in transfer payments made by the poor to the rich, and, fourth and finally, those supporting a programme of welfare relief for the ill, the old and the very young.

GOVERNMENT SUPERVISION OF THE LABOUR AND GRAIN MARKETS

Providing jobs -- either permanently or seasonally -- was the reform most often suggested by the essayists. If begging were to be considered a crime, they insisted, it was the government's responsibility to provide work for the unemployed. 'Si personne ne doit rester désœuvré, il faut que le gouvernement procure à chacun les moyens de s'occuper utilement selon ses forces et ses talents'.⁵ 'Quel est le but du Gouvernement?' another essayist asked and then responded: 'N'est-ce pas de procurer du travail à ceux qui n'en ont point afin de leur faire éviter la mendicité?'.⁶

⁵ AD Marne I J 42 No. 109, an unidentified Frenchman living and teaching in Brunswick, Germany.

⁶ AD Marne I J 40 No. 50. The essayists is the medical doctor and self-styled 'homme de loi' Gueniot from Tonnerre.

TABLE IV
ADVOCATES OF DIRECT GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION
TO RELIEVE LABOURING POOR AND THEIR DEPENDENTS

ALL ESSAYISTS No. = 152 total No. proposing reform	% of 152	FIRST ESTATE No. = 31 No. proposing reform	% of 31	SECOND ESTATE No. = 21 No. proposing reform	% of 21	THIRD ESTATE No. = 62 No. proposing reform	% of 62	UNIDENTIFIED No. = 38 No. proposing reform	% of 38
Public Aid to ill, old, very 98 young	64%	20	65%	16	76%	40	65%	22	58%
Income supplements 45 money/food	30%	8	26%	7	33%	17	27%	13	34%
Supervision wages/prices 36	24%	7	23%	3	14%	17	27%	9	24%

TABLE V
ESSAYISTS ADVOCATING LAND REFORM

ALL ESSAYISTS No. = 74 Total No. proposing reform	% of 74	FIRST ESTATE No. = 12 No. proposing reform	% of 12	SECOND ESTATE No. = 10 No. proposing reform	% of 10	THIRD ESTATE No. = 30 No. proposing reform	% of 30	UNIDENTIFIED No. = 22 No. proposing reform	% of 22
Church land 17	23%	6	50%	1	10%	8	27%	2	9%
Church & private (all large, seign, domain 37 waste, common)	50%	3	25%	7	70%	16	53%	11	50%
Seignorial land 1	1%	-		-		-		1	5%
Royal domain 2	3%	1	8%	1	10%	-		-	
Uncultivated land 14	19%	2	17%	1	10%	5	17%	6	27%
Common 3	4%	-		-		1	3%	2	9%

TABLE VI
ESSAYISTS ADVOCATING LONG-TERM STRUCTURAL REFORM

ALL ESSAYISTS No. = 152 total No. proposing reform	% of 152	FIRST ESTATE No. = 31 No. proposing reform	% of 31	SECOND ESTATE No. = 21 No. proposing reform	% of 21	THIRD ESTATE No. = 62 No. proposing reform	% of 62	UNIDENTIFIED No. = 38 No. proposing reform	% of 38
Long-term structural reforms ^a 140	92%	27	87%	19	90%	56	90%	36	95%
Public works projects ^b 111	68%	21	68%	17	81%	48	77%	25	66%
Structural tax reform ^c 84	55%	14	45%	16	76%	33	53%	21	55%
Land reform ownership/ usufruct ^d 74	49%	12	39%	10	48%	30	48%	22	58%
Both land and tax reform ^e 55	36%	10	32%	9	42%	23	37%	13	34%
Technical education/ retraining ^f 56	37%	11	35%	8	38%	25	40%	13	34%
Tools, seed raw materials advances ^g 41	27%	7	23%	6	29%	15	24%	13	34%

^a any one or more of the following long-term structural reforms

^b publicly funded national or local, permanent or temporary public works projects

^c structural tax reform removing socially - or professionally-based fiscal exemptions

^d royally directed redistribution of land or its use or regulation of the size of rent rate of leased properties

^e combination of land and tax reforms

^f technical education or re-education for the young, unskilled or structurally unemployed

^g distribution of tools, seed, raw materials, advances or subsidies

One hundred and eleven essayists (73% of the 152) advocated the establishment of a system of public works, usually administered locally but funded from a central 'caisse' or treasury put together from involuntary contributions or taxes. These public works were to be temporary in areas where seasonal unemployment was the problem⁷ and fixed and permanent in areas where the number of those who habitually needed outside employment to live was far exceeded by the number of jobs available to them.⁸ Under this system the government would use its bureaucracy to monitor the employment situation in the various regions; provincial officials would collect and collate information about the kind of work required by potential employers and then, on the basis of this information, provide those who needed work with detailed and dependable guidance about the work available in their locale.⁹ Acting through its provincial officials, the central government could act as an employment bureau providing centralized local and regional information about jobs in the private sector as well as in the permanent, government-administered ateliers. These ateliers would form the central plank of a new government policy which would recognize that unemployment was the principal cause of begging. Work in the public ateliers was therefore not to be compulsory -- that is, not repressive as

⁷ AD Marne I J 40 Nos. 50, 58, 63 and 76 and I J 49 Nos 8 and 34.

⁸ Ad Marne I J 39 No. 24, I J 40 Nos 57 and 58, Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 863.

⁹ AD Marne I J 38 Nos 3, 6, 7 and 9; I J 39 Nos. 28, 29, 37, 38 and 46; I J 40 No. 57; I J 41 No. 95 and I J 42 Nos. 112, 113 and 122. The idea that the Crown should assume responsibility for finding work for France's poor was nothing new. An edict of 13 April 1685 read as follows: 'La bonté que nous avons pour tous nos sujets nous engage à procurer les moyens de gagner leur vie à ceux qui ont la volonté de s'employer aux ouvrages dont ils sont capables.' Isambert, et al, Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises, XIX, 504, cited by Léon Cahen, 'Les Idées charitables à Paris au XVII^e et au XVIII^e siècles d'après les règlements des compagnies paroissiales', Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine, II (Mai-Juin 1900), 16. See also Marcel Lecoq, L'Assistance par le travail en France (Thèse droit) (Paris, V. Giard and E. Brière, 1900).

it had been in the past; and work done on an ateliers was henceforth to be paid at the rate prevailing in the region. The suggestions of Charles Gabriel Delabalme, a lieutenant in the maréchaussé of the généralité of Paris are typical of those of his fellow Châlons essayists:

Pour ôter tout prétexte à la paresse et pour venir efficacement au secours de ceux qui véritablement manquent d'ouvrage, élevons dans chaque province un nombre suffisant d'ateliers fixes et permanents où tous les mendiants de l'un et l'autre sexe habitants de la province soient reçus et payés au taux du pays, à raison de leur sexe, de leur âge et de leur sçavoir faire.¹⁰

¹⁰ AD Marne I J 40 No. 58. The essayists' insistence that the government should intervene to 'faire circuler les hommes comme les denrées et les espèces' (AD Marne I J 38 No. 3) acknowledged the importance of migration for seasonal work in the incomes of large numbers of eighteenth-century French people. In 1810 it was estimated that approximately 200,000 individuals migrated outside their départements in search of labour every year -- which meant that up to a million people depended on this migration for their livelihood. On this subject see Professor Hufton's excellent chapter III: 'An Economy of Makeshifts', pp. 69-127, in The Poor of Eighteenth Century France.

Betraying his own anxiety as an officer responsible for policing the roads and the indigent who used them and a bureaucratic mentality acquired through the exercise of these responsibilities, Delabalme suggested that the government also assume an official role in the collection and dissemination of information about job opportunities in the private sector, information which could then be added to its list of jobs available in the ateliers of each sub-delegation and then published at government expense in monthly or bi-monthly bulletins. To illustrate the practicality of his suggestions, Delabalme provided a sample of the information he proposed employment bulletins might contain.

Province de _____ subdélégation de _____

Par le Roy et M. L'Intendant

Avis au Public

On donne avis au public que tout domicilié de la province ayant besoin de

travail, homme ou garçon, depuis l'âge de 15 jusqu'à 70 ans, en trouvera à _____

Et qu'il a été établi des maisons de travail fixes et permanentes, dans lesquelles on trouvera de l'ouvrage en tout temps et toute saison.

Sçavoir pour les femmes, les filles et les enfans depuis 10 ans jusqu'à soixante passés, du métier de _____

à _____

à _____

et pour les hommes et garçons depuis 15 ans jusqu'à 70 ans du métier de _____

à _____

The essayists suggested that the poor be employed not only to build highways, dig canals, drain marshes, plant forests, de-stone fields, clean streets and gutters and collect rubbish (a Parisian talks a great deal about the 'mauvais air' and the 'fermentation en raison de la population' in urban areas) but also in manufacturing funded wholly by the government or by a combination of public and private resources.¹¹ In those areas where agricultural work or related public or private employment in that sector were insufficient to absorb all the excess population in need of work, the government could, these essayist suggest, also establish permanent ateliers for the manufacture of textiles for which the government itself could provide the principal market. By monitoring work available in the private sector and creating temporary and permanent agricultural and industrial ateliers funded by public and private resources the government would be able to do away with the dreaded dépôts de mendicité. The essayist Duperron, who described the condition of those willing but without work as 'l'indigence laborieuse', offered a succinct statement of the problem and of the solution as he and many of his fellow competitors saw it.

Il faut l'avouer, ce ne sont point les bras qui manquent au travail; c'est le travail qui manque aux bras. C'est donc une manufacture de première nécessité qu'il faut créer.¹²

¹¹ The Parisian is Dom Pierre Paul, AD Marne I J 40 No. 69. For examples of the various kinds of work which the essayists suggest see: AD Marne I J 39 Nos 24, 25, 29 and 49; I J 40 Nos 56 and 61; I J 41 Nos 78, 82 and 96; and I J 42 No. 111. The unidentified essayist who wrote I J 41 No. 83 provided a detailed scheme for funding ateliers through a system involving both government resources and 'un nombre d'actionnaires pris parmi les négocians, fabriquans, cultivateurs, associés d'agriculture dans chacun des cantons'.

¹² Duperron, Discours prononcé à l'Académie, p. 24. Duperron wanted the government, along with private investors, to establish a silk and cotton spinning and weaving works which could be housed in the chateau of Chambord and employ up to 6,000 people, drawn from the poor from Picardie,

Several of the essayists, referring favourably to the edict of 1762 (which permitted peasants to produce textiles without belong to a weavers' guild on condition that they conform to all the industry's rules),¹³ pointed out the advantages of establishing manufacturing in rural areas where rent and food and therefore wages were cheaper.¹⁴ Still others advanced the more sophisticated argument that if the government created jobs for people without land it was, in a way, providing them with a patrimony -- and here I will cite the observations of only one such essayist whose 'political arithmetic' went as follows: a worker, trained and provided with a job, could earn net for himself as much as a man with twelve arpents of land. Therefore, ran his argument, 'l'exercice des arts et métiers est [...] le moyen de procurer une sorte de patrimoine à ceux qui n'en est pas et les admettre en quelque sort au partage des propriétés foncières'.¹⁵

Hainaut, Cambresis, Flanders and Artois and the Loire valley region. He noted in his essay that among other factors favouring the establishment of such an extensive programme at Chambord was the chateau's location near the Loire and its easy communication with Nantes and thus with France's overseas colonies for the raw materials the manufacturing project would need. Duperron further suggested that once the works at Chambord had been established and tried, it could be taken as a model on which other textile centres could be established in each generality. 'Chaque généralité occuperait ses pauvres & en moins de trois années on ne verroit plus de mendiants parmi ceux qui ont des yeux et des bras; on verroit partout s'élever de nouveaux fabriquans.'

¹³ Archives Nationales F-12 560, 'Arret du Conseil d'état du Roy qui permet à tous les habitants de la campagne et à ceux des lieux où il n'y a point de communautés de fabriquer les étoffes suivant les dispositions des règlements du 7 septembre 1762'. See in particular Article I.

¹⁴ Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420 and AD Marne I J 49 No. 38.

¹⁵ Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420. Professor Mendels assesses the actual benefits of labour-intensive rural 'manufacturing' on the standard of living of those peasants engaged in it in his article 'Proto-industrialization: The First Phase of the Industrial Process'. For recent discussion of the validity of this argument in practice see Liana Vardi, The Land and the Loom: Peasants and Profit in Northern France, 1680-1800 (Durham - London, Duke University Press, 1993).

In addition to providing jobs outright for the unemployed, public authorities could further reduce the problem of unemployment, these writers suggest, by providing technical training for the young or those who lacked skills, and by advancing tools, seed or raw materials to those who possessed skills or land but who lacked the means of exercising their trade or cultivating the land. Fifty-six essayists (or 37% of the 152) advocated some form of technical education for the young or unskilled or re-training for the structurally unemployed -- all 'au dépens du trésor public'.¹⁶ The essayists were particularly insistent that public authorities create institutions to instruct un- or under-employed peasants in the industrial arts. The dépôt director Montlinot suggested that in most cases 'le pauvre ne sait où apprendre un métier, ou n'apprenant que le plus commun, la plupart du temps il ne sait que devenir quand l'ouvrage vient à lui manquer'. Training the unemployed and landless peasant would eventually enable him to find new and skilled work; but better still would be to introduce a system of schools to train the children of the poor. Like so many of his fellow Châlons essayists, Montlinot insisted that the education of the popular classes had been neglected for too long. As a result, according to him, 'on laisse dans l'oubli tous les arts mécaniques' which for the landless peasant or the structurally unemployed represented 'la seule ressource'. With an eye towards the future these essayists predict that the possession of a skilled trade would be increasingly essential to the popular classes as population -- particularly urban population -- grew and so they suggested that large technical schools be built in major cities 'fourni d'excellens ouvriers en tout genre [...] où l'on donneroit

¹⁶ AD Marne I J 42 No. 104.

gratuitement des leçons pratiques sur les arts les plus communs [aux] enfans du peuple'.¹⁷

Forty-one essayists (or 27% of the 152) maintained that many of those currently lacking work would be able to function as useful labouring members of society if they were provided the tools, seed or raw materials they needed. These essayists suggested that the poor of rural France should be provided not only with seed and agricultural implements that would enable them to cultivate gardens of their own and to hire themselves out as labourers on someone else's land¹⁸ but also with tools and raw materials of domestic industry that would enable them to work spinning and weaving cloth, making stockings, lace or ribbon when the seasonal rhythms of agricultural labour left them otherwise without sufficient income to feed their families.¹⁹ In suggesting these reforms the Châlons essayists demonstrated once again their realistic recognition that the survival of a poor family depended on all its members making some sort of contribution to the family economy. The essayists therefore repeatedly urged public authorities to supply women, children and old people with raw materials and tools on the grounds that the income from the sale of the goods they produced could supplement the agricultural wages of the father and enable

¹⁷ AD Marne I J 40 No. 66. On the subject of technical education see AD Marne I J 38 Nos 3 and 17, I J 39 Nos 32 and 43, I J 41 Nos 72 and 81; I J 42 No. 114, I J 49 No. 20. The founder of the Éphémérides du Citoyen, the Abbé Baudeau had in 1765 expressed views (which he subsequently disavowed) on technical training and work for the indigent similar to those expressed by the Châlons essayists a decade or more later. In his Idées d'un citoyen sur les droits et devoirs des vrais pauvres (Amsterdam-Paris, 1765) he wrote: 'Nous désirons qu'on [...] ne traite point comme des scélérats des indigents valides, qui ne savent pas travailler et n'ont pas d'ouvrage, mais qu'on leur apprenne à le faire et qu'on leur en fournisse.'

¹⁸ AD Marne I J 38 Nos 3 and 9, I J 39 Nos 30 and 33 and I J 40 Nos. 53 and 54.

¹⁹ AD Marne I J 40 No. 58.

the family to earn its living. 'Quoique les salaires considérés séparément soient très modiques', an essayist wrote from Reims, 'cependant leur réunion apporte une grande aisance dans un ménage de cinq ou six personnes. Quarante ou cinquante sols par jour acquis dans les moments inutiles au travail de la terre', could, he calculated, when 'ajouté au produit de la culture de quelques arpens de terre qui nourrissent en partie le ménage augmente sensiblement la fortune du père de famille'.²⁰

The Châlons essayists expressed enormous sympathy for the skilled or semi-skilled artisan in town or countryside who wished to ply his trade but who could only get raw materials and sell his finished products through dependence on exploitative middlemen. Observation of the suffering of these men had persuaded the essayists that poor artisans generally lacked the capital to compete independently in either a free market or one dominated by guild restrictions; these essayists frequently advanced the suggestion that public authorities should supervise 'l'achat des matières premières pour occuper dans une ville et ailleurs tous ces ouvriers de bonne volonté et la facilité du débit de leur ouvrage'.²¹ Although supplying poor artisans the raw materials they needed and supervising the marketing of the finished goods would involve public authorities in economic affairs more than some of the essayists clearly would have wished under ideal circumstances, the essayists reckoned that the social consequences of large-scale unemployment were so serious that both central and local governments should act decisively to encourage still further the spread of the rural textile industry as the most reliable and least

²⁰ Bibliothèque Municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 1275. MS 863 advances a similar argument.

²¹ AD Marne I J 38 No. 3, I J 40 No. 72 and I J 41 No. 76.

expensive means of employing the un- or under-employed.²² As the number of essayists favouring government intervention to facilitate as much as possible the production of textiles and other haberdashery by poor urban and rural artisans would indicate, there was among the essayists strong Turgotesque opposition to the guilds and equally strong endorsement of the government's recent, though faltering, attempts to break the power of the guilds with their licensing power that made learning and exercising a trade a privilege.²³

Still another group of reforms advocated by the Châlons essayists provides evidence of the persistence of anxiety about the vulnerability of those living at or near subsistence and the conviction, frequently expressed by the essayists, that under existing market conditions the working population was unable to earn sufficient money to provide unaided its most basic needs. The essayists' advocacy of income supplements and the reimposition of royal control over the grain trade demonstrates how fully they accepted as unavoidable fact what most public men of their era seem unwilling to acknowledge: that is, 'that the working population of France was in receipt of wages inadequate for the proper maintenance of a family'.²⁴ Forty-five essayists (or 30% of the 152) petitioned the Crown to order local authorities -- usually the curé working with municipal

²² The conservative Dr Clouet of Verdun wrote: 'Les fileurs et fileuses sont de tous les ouvriers [currently unemployed] les plus nombreux; c'est par conséquent l'espèce de travail dont on doit le plus occuper'. In his view, therefore, authorities should commit resources to 'procurer à tous les pauvres valides qui savent quelques métiers tous les secours dont ils ont besoin pour gagner leur vie en l'exerçant: et de faire instruire ceux qui n'en savent point dans quelque art ou profession qui les mettra en état de subsister par leur industrie'. AD Marne I J 42 No. 114.

²³ See on this subject in particular AD Marne I J 40 No. 66 and I J 41 No. 78.

²⁴ Hufton, 'Towards an Understanding of the Poor in Eighteenth Century France', p. 164.

councils -- to provide their labouring poor with money or food to supplement inadequate wages. Observation had persuaded these essayists that even when the poor man was in full employment, his wages were usually so low that 'le gain seul ne le feroit pas vivre'. Therefore, nearly a third of the essayists expressed the conviction that with small subsidies wages could be brought up to a viable level where 'le gain devient suffisant avec l'addition qu'on y joint chaque semaine'.²⁵ Moreover, the essayists argued that with the poor man earning at low, market-determined wages and buying his bread at high market prices, as was then the case, the income supplement given him should be provided not 'à titre d'aumône' but rather 'la somme ne doit être considérée que comme un poids qui rétablir l'équilibre entre la main d'oeuvre et la cherté des vivres'.²⁶

However, more significant still than the number of those advocating income supplements is the number of essayists -- thirty-six or 14% -- who wanted the government to begin monitoring wages and prices to see that they were kept in some approximation to each other, that is, that the labouring man be given a living wage. The French monarchy had, in the past, frequently set the price of bread (and sometimes of grain and flour) but rarely had it intervened in the determination of wages. As a rule its policy had been to supervise the regulation of the grain trade and to assume responsibility for provisioning only temporarily and in crisis situations -- as in 1709, 1725-26, 1738-42 and 1765-75 -- when government at all levels had intervened directly to purchase grain on domestic and foreign markets. And, although the Crown throughout the Old Regime exerted pressure on producers and traders to see that the Paris market was always

²⁵ AD Marne I J 38 No. 12. The essayist is an infantry officer, Descombes, stationed in Germany. See also I J 38 No 37, I J 39 nos. 29, 38 and 39, I J 40 Nos 57 and 66.

²⁶ AD Marne I J 40 No. 66.

well supplied, as late as mid-century it had taken no responsibility for the establishment of grain reserves anywhere in the kingdom outside Paris.²⁷ Public authorities -- and subsequent historians -- believed the supply of French grain sufficient for domestic needs.²⁸ Yet, the Châlons essayists consistently expressed concern that monopolies and poor communication between regions, rising prices and stable or declining wages put adequate supplies of bread beyond the reach of many poor citizens at the best of times and of most of the labouring poor in times of dearth. The essayists therefore called upon the Crown to 'établir des magasins publics dans les chef lieux de chaque délégation',²⁹ where the government would provide 'à un prix plus supportable des denrées de première nécessité'.³⁰ These essayists petitioned the Crown to equalize prices between regions, insuring that 'le bled fut toujours à un prix égal dans toutes les provinces du Royaume',³¹ and forbidding private producers from exporting 'des denrées qui peuvent être consommées dans l'Etat'.³² 'Le

²⁷ Steven L. Kaplan, Bread, Politics and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV, 2 vols (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), p. 9 and pp. 86-92.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 9 and Morineau, Les Faux-Semblants d'un démarrage économique, pp. 321-25.

²⁹ AD Marne I J 40 No. 67. On the subject of national granaries see also AD Marne I J 40 No. 76, I J 41 No. 90 and I J 42 Nos 114 and 117. Necker favoured grain reserves from the first of February to the first of June. Necker, Sur la législation et commerce des grains (Paris, Pissot, 1775), p. 88.

³⁰ AD Marne I J 41 No. 90. The memory of this essayist, the curé Gaillard, is particularly long. As argument for the establishment of the 'greniers' he reminds his readers of the 'dureté générale' which had followed 'les époques de 1709 et 1740 où on a vu monté[es] à un taux exorbitant les denrées de première nécessité. Le mal eût été moindre', he insists, 's'il se fût trouvé des magasins publics dans les principales villes'.

³¹ AD Marne I J 41 No. 83.

³² Gosselin, Réflexions d'un Citoyen, p. 67. Gosselin's argument in favour of government controls over when and what grain could be exported

ministère doit scavoir', an essayist from Avesnes added, 'combien de tems les habitans peuvent vivre dans le royaume avec une récolte ordinaire et faire en sorte qu'il y ait toujours dans le Royaume des grains pour deux ans'. If grain were lacking in one province, he continued, 'on doit en aider la circulation aux dépens de tout le Royaume parce que ce sont des malheurs que nous devons supporter en commun'. The transfer of grain from one region to another should be accomplished, however, only after the government 'l'a annoncé au peuple par une ordonnance [...] parce que cette annonce empêche que les grains ne soient portés à un prix excessif et l'on évite le soulèvement du peuple qui se mutine lorsqu'il voit circuler des grains qui sortent de sa province'.³³ Clearly 'psychological dearth'³⁴ and the persistence of subsistence preoccupations continued to concern the Châlons essayists despite the optimistic forecasts of the eighteenth century's leading economic indicators.

were part of a much larger argument he advanced about the rights of society over private property. For example, the phrase just cited is taken from a passage in which he argues that the government should '[faire] plier le droit rigoureux de propriété du petit nombre aux besoins actuels de la multitude. Par-là, j'entends que les grands propriétaires doivent être regardés simplement comme Economes d'un bien sur le quel la société a des droits: or l'on sait qu'un Econome n'a pas la faculté de disposer à son gré & à sa fantaisie des biens qui lui sont confiés; d'où il résulte que ceux qui possèdent les biens, ne doivent point avoir la liberté de gaspiller, de gâter, de corrompre & même d'exporter des denrées qui peuvent être consommées dans l'Etat, ou des matières propres à être façonnées par les Artisans avant que le nécessaire de tous ait été prélevé. Il n'y a que le superflu qu'il soit permis de vendre à l'étranger. Autrement ce seroit dérober le pain des enfans pour le donner à d'autres.'

The author of I J 49 No. 31, although much more conservative than Gosselin about the rights of private property, agrees with him that the Crown should monitor prices and exports: 'que le prix du bled qui fait la richesse de la France [...] ne soit ni excessif, ni modique, que le Roy peut déterminer facilement en permettant la sortie après en avoir fait des magasins'.

³³ AD Marne I J 40 No. 60.

³⁴ The term is Steven Kaplan's, Bread and Politics, p. 81.

It was essential, these essayists insisted, that the Crown recognize that 'l'administration du pain [...] la base d'un Etat, le seul alimentation qui satisfait l'indigent et soutien son existence [...] devoit être sacrée'.³⁵ They consistently reminded the Crown that peasants were not only producers but consumers as well and that unregulated grain prices forced them to buy on the market at high prices what need forced them to sell to their landlord or creditor at low prices. Whereas the physiocrats might regard grain as an essentially commercial matter, for the people and the essayists writing about and for them for the Châlons Academy, grain meant bread and so should be regarded by the Crown as a matter of singular political and administrative importance. The government should, the curé Pauvert counselled, make it its business to 'conduire cette affaire de manière que les pauvres ne rachètent pas à un haut prix ce qu'ils ont vendu eux-mêmes à bas prix';³⁶ in order to achieve this end, a fellow essayist added, the government should pass 'une ordonnance pour empêcher l'excès dans les prix des grains'.³⁷ Still other essayists believed that these new initiatives should be undertaken alongside a reversion to the principles which had previously prompted the Crown to intervene in the grain markets in time of crisis, purchasing grain on the

³⁵ AD Marne I J 41 No. 83.

³⁶ AD Marne I J 49 No. 17.

³⁷ AD Marne I J 40 No. 60. The essayists' arguments are subtle. The doctor François Trioson, from Chaise Dieu in Auvergne, for example, betrays his view of the social hierarchy at the same time he sets out what he believes should be the government's policy on the grain trade. While accepting that wheat could perhaps be an uncontrolled commodity since it was the 'bon grain que mangent la plus part des gens inutiles en France', he insists that 'les viles denrées telles que le seigle, l'orge, l'avoine et autres qui sont la nourriture la plus ordinaire du laboureur ou journalier' be maintained 'toujours à un bas prix, parce que c'est la nourriture sacrée de nos laboureurs et cultivateurs des campagnes'. The contrast between those who were useless to society and those who made up its useful members and the obligations of the government to see to the needs of the latter could not be more clear. AD Marne I J 49 No. 19.

open market in order to sell it to the poor at prices well below the market rate. 'Dans les cas où [les denrées] deviendroient si chères qu'il seroit impossible aux pauvres de s'en procurer [...] il vaudroit mieux que le gouvernement se chargeât d'en acheter lui-même au prix courant pour les distribuer à un prix modéré.'³⁸ During periods of particular hardship, these writers suggested, the government should go still further, providing 'le pain à moitié ou à tiers moins de sa valeur à ceux dont la pauvreté sera bien constatée'.³⁹

Throughout these essays we find a strong reaction against the policies the government had essayed in decontrolling the grain trade. Like the people themselves, these essayists seem to regard the introduction of these policies, however briefly, as a serious violation of the Crown's traditional and fundamental duty to safeguard the subsistence of all its subjects. The Frenchmen addressing their sovereign through this royal academy therefore argued vehemently that in abandoning the labouring classes to an unregulated market the Crown had abdicated one of its most fundamental responsibilities. Before concerning itself with reforms which would authorize even the sale of surplus grain, the Crown should, they insisted, take full cognizance of the fact that many within the labouring classes were unable easily to satisfy their most basic subsistence requirements without recourse to public charity during at least some part of the year.

The other side of the poor man's clipped coin was wages. The essayists therefore appealed to the Crown to ensure that 'les journées leur

³⁸ Gosselin, Réflexions d'un citoyen, p. 71.

³⁹ AD Marne I J 42 No. [204]. This essay was not submitted to the Academy until March of 1778, arriving well after it had awarded its prizes for the competition on begging. It seems however to have combined the subject of that competition with one just announced by the academy on popular education.

fussent payé au prorata du prix du pain'.⁴⁰ They reminded their sovereign that work itself was a solution to the problem of poverty only if the worker received 'un juste salaire qui puisse faire subsister l'individu sans le rendre malheureux'.⁴¹ They therefore advocated intervention by the government to 'veiller à ce que les denrées de première nécessité ne soit pas au prix arbitraire de ceux qui les vendent' and also to 'veiller que les maîtres ouvriers ne donnent pas un prix trop modique à leurs compagnons'.⁴² The economic vision of these essayists was perhaps best summarized by the essay competitor and perpetual secretary of the Châlons Academy, François Sabbathier. He wrote in his contest essay: 'La Législateur doit saisir tous les moyens capables de remettre [...] la disproportion de salaire avec la valeur des denrées [...] dans l'équilibre'.⁴³ And in a clear anti-physiocratic statement he added:

⁴⁰ AD Marne I J 49 No. 3, an unidentified Breton clergyman living near Paris.

⁴¹ AD Marne I J 40 No. 69. A.W. Coats reported a similar concern in England after mid-century with raising wages and a rejection of earlier arguments in favour of depressing wage levels 'in order to enforce consistent and arduous toil'. Coats, 'Changing Attitudes to Labour in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., II (August 1958), 35-61.

⁴² AD Marne I J 39 No. 29. Rabigot added: 'il seroit à désirer que le gouvernement voulût bien donner de tems en tems un coup d'oeil sur le prix qui donnent à leurs ouvriers les maîtres de chaque métier. On ne peut imaginer combien l'avarice et la dureté de ces maîtres occasionnent de misère parmi les ouvriers qu'ils employent.'

⁴³ AD Marne I J 40 No. 70. It is unusual to find discussion of government intervention on the side of the wage-earner in eighteenth century documents drafted so early in Louis XVI's reign (late 1776/early 1777). When wages were mentioned in the cahiers, for example, it was only to ask that they be maintained at a rate proportionate to prices. However, in the cahier of Gournay-sur-Marne one finds a comment quite similar to that expressed by Sabbathier: 'que le salaire du malheureux journalier soit réglé équitablement sur les besoins communs de l'humanité, au lieu de l'abandonner totalement aux estimations dédaigneuses et arbitraires des riches que la grande concurrence favorise toujours'. On the typicality of this request in the cahiers see Roger Picard, Les Cahiers de 1789 au point de vue industriel et commercial. Thèse pour le doctorat ès-sciences juridiques. (Paris, Marcel Rivière et Cie, 1910), pp. 103-06.

Je sais que jusqu'au présent on a pensé que cette équilibre s'opérait de lui-même par la nécessité. Cependant comme ce temps peut être long et que l'attente est excessivement dure pour beaucoup de misérables qui patissent, il ne faut pas négliger ce qui tendrait à l'abrégier afin d'éviter de sacrifier la génération présente au bonheur des générations futures.⁴⁴

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION IN THE LAND MARKET

A second category of reforms altogether were those dealing with the redistribution of the ownership or usufruct of property. Even to suggest reforms that would bring property rights and laws into question was, these essayists recognized, a serious criticism of the existing social and legal order; and, yet, the situation of the labouring poor appeared to these writers so wretched that they felt impelled to write to a royal corporate body, the Châlons Academy, advocating reforms that would, if adopted, alter the fundamental constitution of French society. These essayists made no attempt to deny that such reforms would meet with opposition. As the parish priest Duverger wrote: 'je ne déguise pas les difficultés. Vous touchez, dirait-on, à ce que la société a de plus sacré, vous touchez aux propriétés'.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, he and another 74 essayists, almost half or 49% of the 152 essayists writing for these two competitions, went on to suggest that the ownership or usufruct of land currently in the hands of Crown, Church, seigneurs or other great landlords should be redirected to the benefit of those on whose labour its productivity depended. Table V

⁴⁴ Ibid. Sabbathier, who had himself been an employee and who subsequently would be an employer, elaborated his argument, suggesting that the government ateliers, which were to be designed to absorb excess labouring population, could eventually drive up wages in the private sector by reducing the number of workers in the labour pool. With labour a scarce commodity, wages would be forced up thus helping to re-establish the proportion between prices and wages.

⁴⁵ AD Marne I J 39 No. 25.

provides an overview of the kinds of land whose ownership or usufruct the essayists wished to see transferred. With the precedent of the Crown's confiscation of Jesuit property in France in the 1760s and other, minor reforms touching monastic property in subsequent years, it is perhaps not surprising that almost three-quarters of those mentioning land reform as part of the solution made Church land one of their targets.⁴⁶ More surprising, however, is the fact that half of the essayists proposed a redistribution of Church land (corporate property) and private property. The essayist Gosselin summed up the views of the essayists of this persuasion with his assertion that all of France's current social and economic problems could be solved 'en subdivisant des grandes propriétés tant des particuliers que du domaine de l'Eglise et de la couronne'.⁴⁷

It was, nevertheless, the vast landed wealth of the Church, held by the upper and regular clergy, which was the main target of the essayists' criticism. Estimates made by the essayists of the land held in France by the Church ran as high as one-third: 'l'église en France possède le tiers des propriétés du Royaume indépendamment de la dixme sur l'universalité des

⁴⁶ An unidentified essayist from Saint Linien wrote: 'On ne doit pas dissimuler que le gouvernement n'aye fait quelques pas vers le bien: [...] l'affranchissement de la dime pour les défrichemens, la suppression des Jésuites, la réforme de quelques autres ordres monastiques, le retard de l'âge pour l'émission des vœux [...] nous prouvent que si nous sommes encore éloignés du terme [of what he calls elsewhere in his Châlons essay, 'le siècle philosophique'] nous en tenons la route. [...] Il fut un emploi digne d'un corps académique, c'est celui de représenter au souverain qui veille au gouvernement ce qui est capable de hâter pour ses sujets ce bonheur'. AD Marne I J 41 No. 98. It is worth noting that despite this essayist's reference to a 'siècle philosophique' and his open listing of reforms recently undertaken by the Crown, the only bibliographical sources he cites in his essay beyond the Bible are a sprinkling of classical authors and some very early French history. He also mentions as a source for his ideas his observation of the activities of an unnamed royal intendant.

⁴⁷ Gosselin, Réflexions d'un Citoyen.

fonds', according to the reckoning of two of the competitors.⁴⁸ However, most of those who put a figure to the extent of the Church's property in France ventured that it amounted to roughly one-fifth overall of the land. Arguing that the size of the ecclesiastical population was infinitesimal when compared to the extent of the land the Church controlled in France, those advocating reforms to ecclesiastical property claimed that it was not only unreasonable that so few should control so much but that only the lower clergy, devoid of any significant wealth, served their communities whereas the great ecclesiastical seigneurs of the upper and regular clergy failed to contribute 'aucun vestige du travail sociable'.⁴⁹ The Châlons essayists employed many of the arguments for confiscation -- or at least administration -- of Church property by 'le Ministère Public',⁵⁰ which would be used to justify such action in the Revolution; but they did so claiming that in advocating reforms that would reduce the monopoly of the upper and regular clergy over much of the nation's arable land they were merely articulating views which were widely held by members of the public -- reforms 'attendues longtemps par le Peuple comme le plus grand avantage pour l'Etat'.⁵¹ They expressed bitter criticism of ecclesiastical

⁴⁸ AD Marne I J 41 98 and I J 42 No. 110.

⁴⁹ AD Marne I J 38 No. 9. The unidentified author of essay No. 98 (AD Marne I J 41) gave the following definition: ' [...] clergé utile, c'est à dire des évêques, des curés et des vicaires'. He was not alone in those views though most of those who listed useful clergy neglected to mention bishops.

⁵⁰ AD Marne I J 41 No. 89.

⁵¹ AD Marne I J 41 No. 98. Rabigot Delacroix seconded the view of this unidentified essayist and added that 'les peuples [...] demandent à grands cris la réforme du clergé et l'abolition des ordres religieux espérant par là détruire la mendicité'. In parenthesis the choirmaster confided to the Academy: 'A Dieu ne plaise qu'en découvrant les abus du cloître je veuille attaquer le culte consacré par la Religion [...] ou déshonorer le corps entier des pasteurs du second ordre qu'on ne sauroit trop respecter. Qu'on n'imagine pas que se soit la haine qui me fait parler contre les ordres religieux, je ne suis touché que du malheur des

seigneurs and were quick to point to the great irony of enormous wealth enjoyed by those who had 'fait vœu de pauvreté'.⁵² Over a third of the 152 essayists argued that although the land monopolized by ecclesiastical seigneurs and religious communities was theirs ostensibly so they could aid the poor, they in fact used this land and power to exploit the poor instead. And yet, although the injury exacting ecclesiastical landlords inflicted upon their tenants was the most blatant misuse of the Church's so-called stewardship of its land, they harmed the people in another less direct but equally devastating way: since ecclesiastical property was held in mort-main, a large portion of the land in France was in fact unavailable for purchase in a market that was clamouring for it.⁵³ The most

Etats et de la misère des Peuples.' AD Marne I J 39 No. 29.

⁵² AD Marne I J 39 No. 29. The regular clergy had its most bitter, although certainly not its only, critic among the essayists in Rabigot Delacroix. 'Quelle bisarrerie! faire vœu de pauvreté et s'emparer du bien d'autrui! dire qu'on prie sans cesse pour la prospérité de l'Etat et en ruiner les peuples! renoncer aux grandeurs de ce monde et avoir droit de vie et de mort sur des hommes parce qu'ils demeurent sur des [biens] appartenants à des hommes qui n'aspirent qu'après les biens de l'autre vie! fut-il jamais contradiction plus palpable?'

'Il faudroit écrire sur l'airain ces paroles: ne fais à autrui que ce que tu voudrois qui te fût fait, et les mettre sur la porte de tous les monastères: ces paroles seroient une leçon qui apprendroit aux moines qui s'emparent du bien de leur prochain, qu'ils sont le fléau des Etats [...].'

And then, almost as if to reassure the Academy that what he was saying was not in violation of the spirit of the laws which the Crown had assigned to it, Rabigot added: 'Ce n'est nullement par esprit satirique que je rappelle ces choses'.

⁵³ Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420. Clicquot de Blervache provided the best summary of this criticism. 'Tous les biens cédés au clergé ont contracté le caractère de main-morte, c'est-à-dire qu'ils sont mort pour le commerce. Tous les autres sujets du Roy ne sont plus admis à les acquérir. C'est une portion soustraite à toute mutation. [...] quel que soit l'accroissement de la population et des richesses acquises par le commerce, le peuple ne pourra jamais échanger ces richesses contre une possession ecclésiastique. Il y a un cinquième de terres du royaume, en y comprenant la dixme, qui sont mainmortable. C'est un cinquième dans la masse des propriétés qui n'entre plus dans la circulation et que l'administration ne peut plus offrir comme appât et comme récompense au peuple laborieux. C'est un obstacle qui décourage l'émulation et

vituperative comments about the rich, ecclesiastical landlord came from members of the, by comparison, penurious lower clergy. After accusing the upper clergy of uselessness, the curé Duverger from Bezinghem declared that the upper clergy should be forced to give up its land so that it could then be parcelled out in tiny plots to the indigent. As a result, Duverger argued, the upper clergy would at last become 'utile à la patrie' because instead of merely preaching to the poor about a new birth -- 'une nouvelle naissance', they could also provide them with a new lease on life on earth.⁵⁴

Yet, as Table V indicates, Church land was not the only land to be redistributed under a royal 'loye agraire'⁵⁵ or taken under the directorship of the government. About half of those who advocated land reform simply wanted the Crown to supervise the use and distribution of property. But the terms which they used in describing their suggested

l'industrie dans le même rapport. Le cultivateur des terres main-mortables est donc par l'ordre actuel des choses, condamné à n'en partager jamais la propriété, et à les sillonner éternellement pour autrui.'

Clicquot's calculations and conclusions, expressed in essentially economic terms, were those of many of his fellow Châlons competitors. 'Ce qui met le comble au malheur des peuples et ce qui ruine les Etats, c'est que les biens engloutis par les ordres religieux sont pour toujours dévorés et ne peuvent jamais servir au besoin de la République. Il faut que les charges retombent sur les peuples, et les moines les voyent mendier sans leur donner un morceau de pain [...]. En effet la masse des biens passé dans chaque congrégation de moines ne circulant plus dans l'Etat doit nécessairement en diminuer l'opulence du Royaume. Qui les leur a procurés? l'avarice couverte du voeu de pauvreté.' AD Marne I J 39 No. 29.

⁵⁴ AD Marne I J 39 No. 25. Duverger's disdain for the ecclesiastical seigneur was as great as was Rabigot Delacroix's, but the curé's position, as a member of the lower clergy, made the expression of his views rather more dangerous. He asked, not without irony, 'Et vous que la piété de nos pères a comblés de biens; enfans de saints dont vous chérissez si justement la mémoire, vous qu'on ose accuser d'être à grands frais inutiles à la terre, voulez vous effacer ce reproche humiliant?' Emphasis added. It is worth noting that of the 12 members of the first estate advocating land reform, half of them advocated the government's taking action against Church land.

⁵⁵ A term used by both Duverger and the 'géographe' Lejeune from Soissons, AD Marne I J 41 No. 82.

reforms indicate that these Frenchmen had ceased to believe that private property should be more sacrosanct than the public good. Citing the royal edict of 4 January 1775, for example, the essayists urged the Crown to continue to move in the direction of seeking stability in lease prices by encouraging longer leases;⁵⁶ still others suggested that the Crown should impose ceilings on land rents or at least provide tenants with some sort of security by indexing rents to grain prices.⁵⁷

A more common suggestion was that the Crown should open up unused or uncultivated land for cultivation by the poor. The royal domain and forest land in private hands were frequently mentioned as an obvious source of property that the landless could cultivate;⁵⁸ however, more common still was the suggestion that the seigneur be forced to rent his parkland to the landless in small parcels and at reasonable rates. A clergyman from Paris suggested that what land should be rented in this way could be decided

⁵⁶ Bibliothèque Nationale fonds française 11420, AD Marne I J 49 Nos 20, 21 and 43, and Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 1275.

⁵⁷ AD Marne I J 49 No. 24.

⁵⁸ Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 863. This essayist estimated that there were five million arpents of forest land in France. He wanted the Crown to advance day labourers and their families enough tools and food to live for four months and then let them have to rent at an artificially low rate all the land they could turn over (at a depth of two feet, he specified) during that four months. After that they were to be allowed to rent that land for as long as they would as long as they paid the proprietor -- whether it was the Crown or a private individual which actually owned the land -- 10 livres per year. For similar schemes see AD Marne I J 39 No. 27 and I J 40 No. 67.

Romans de Coppiet, winner of the Academy's 4th honourable mention for the prize contest on the plight of the beggar, estimated that one-sixth of all land in France went uncultivated. He argued that even if one ignored the humanitarian question of the suffering of those without land or without sufficient land to survive easily from their labour, logic alone would decree that the landless should be allowed to work uncultivated land and make it productive. He, too, suggested that the poor be allowed to rent small plots on the royal domain. AD Marne I J 42 No. 113. See also I J 38 No. 12, I J 40 Nos 58 and 65, I J 42 No. 115 and Gosselin, Réflexions d'un Citoyen, p. 28.

'democratically' at the local level. 'Pour obvier aux abus [...] avant de s'emparer des terres en friche ou mal cultivées, il faudra obten[ir] le pouvoir dans une assemblée tenue par tous les fermiers, laboureurs de paroisse'. Included among those present at the assembly would be the individual 'qui jouit, soit en propriété, soit à ferme', the land under consideration for lease to a landless member of their parish. 'Dès qu'on y aura décidé qu'effectivement cette terre n'est pas suffisamment cultivée et qu'il n'est pas en état de faire mieux actuellement', the parishoner who currently held the land 'sera alors forcé de donner son consentement à l'abandon de cette terre'.⁵⁹

And yet, in many instances, even if land were made available to the poor at low rents, they would still be unable to work it because they lacked the tools they would need to work the soil. And so these practically-minded essayists stipulated in their proposals that in addition to overseeing this redistribution of uncultivated property from the prosperous to the needy, the Crown or local authorities should also ensure that the poor renting land under this scheme were, when necessary, advanced tools and even money to work and acquire land at reasonable rates. 'Il est certain', one such essayist wrote, 'que le pauvre ne peut payer le prix de sa ferme qu'avec le temps, mais l'état ne peut-il aider par ses avances?

⁵⁹ AD Marne I J 40 No. 69. The author of this scheme was the Benedictin Dom Pierre Paul. Barbe de la Barthe made a similar proposal: 'obligeons [...] ceux qui ne veulent pas labourer ce champ qui leur appartient de le céder à d'autres, sous une rente fixe et telle que le laboureur puisse avec un travail assidu en retirer assez de fruits pour sa subsistance. C'est ainsi que je voudrais concilier les intérêts du riche et du pauvre'. Barbe de la Barthe maintained that his scheme provided a double benefit: not only would it reconcile the interests of the rich and the poor; it would allow the rich man to retain the title to the property and receive (although not 'earn') an income from it while it brought his land into the market of land available for rent and at a rate that would allow the poor man to enjoy the fruits earned by his labour as well. AD Marne I J 41 No. 87. See also Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 863, I J 39 No. 27, I J 42 No. 100, and I J 49 No. 20.

qu'on fasse pour lui ce qui font les états en faveur des nouvelles colonies?'⁶⁰ The suggestion is also made that the Crown should instruct its officials to make certain that if common land were divided into parcels for cultivation that the land go to the indigent and not to the already prosperous farmer.⁶¹

Since most of the poor with whom these essayists were familiar were agricultural labourers and since the number of workers who could be employed in rural manufacturing seemed to be declining, it is perhaps not surprising that the essayists turned to the cultivation of land as a primary solution to the unemployment problem.⁶² What is surprising,

⁶⁰ AD Marne I J 39 No. 25, Duverger again. Claude Louis Decan, lieutenant de police at Meaux suggested that the government aid these new cultivators during at least the first two years of their tenancy. The laboureurs Fequant and Gosselin and the Baron de St Sulpice, Claude François Morand (member of the Société économique d'agriculture of Chambéry) advanced similar arguments in favour of money advances to those allowed to farm uncultivated land. AD Marne I J 49 Nos 24 and 29 and Gosselin, Réflexions d'un Citoyen, p. 29.

⁶¹ On this subject see especially AD Marne I J 40 No. 71. The essay came from Paris and was simply signed 'Bertrand'. The Bourbon government had repeatedly expressed a similar attitude with regard to its rationale in authorizing the division of common land by household rather than according to the amount of taille paid. From 1770, when it began authorizing this division, the government repeatedly rejected the angry representations of the proprietary classes with regard to its formula for the division of commons. In 1771 the Contrôleur Général wrote 'Tout habitant a un droit égal sur des terrains indivis. En donnant une espèce de propriété à des gens qui n'en ont aucune, on les attache à leur possession, on forme des chefs de famille et des citoyens'. Archives Nationales H 488, dossier de Crollon, Généralité de Caen, quoted by Philippe Sagnac, 'L'Agriculture et les classes rurales en France au XVIII^e siècle', Revue de Synthèse historique, I (Avril 1906), 147.

⁶² Colin, author of the essay AD Marne I J 50 No. 2 preferred employment in agriculture over employment in manufacturing and commerce because, in his observation, commerce and manufacturing were likely to be unreliable and irregular and a way of employing the population preferable only in countries without agricultural land. 'Les Richesses de l'agriculture sont aussi bien plus appréciables que celles d'un commerce capricieux dans ses succès. La France fut toujours plus propre à la culture des campagnes. Le commerce de luxe n'est fait que pour les nations qui n'ont pas de terre. Il faudroit que l'attention du ministère se distribuât avec ce sage discernement, qui nous présente toujours tout d'un coup aux yeux que le certain étant préférable à l'incertain.'

however, is the consistency with which they argued that land be broken up into small parcels so that the landless unemployed could become productive farmers in their own right. Once again Clicquot de Blervache offered one of the clearest arguments in favour of the Crown's acting to increase the number of small owner occupiers -- but he was only one of many to express the following view:

Moins il y a de fermiers qui labourent eux-mêmes et à leur compte, plus il y a de journaliers et d'hommes de peine. Or dans toute affaire économique, plus il y a de gens en sous ordre, moins elle est profitable. L'administration doit donc concourir par la bonne loix à diminuer le nombre des journaliers et des hommes de peine, et à augmenter celui des propriétaires, afin que les travaux productifs soient, le moins qu'il est possible, confiés à des gens à gages et sans intérêt; afin que les richesses de la reproduction croissent annuellement et soient plus également réparties. [...] Les journaliers n'ont dans l'état actuel des choses aucune perspective d'améliorer leur sort, parce que quel que soit leur économie, leurs épargnes sont nécessairement très modiques. Cependant ces épargnes cumulées pendant plusieurs années peuvent leur former un petit pécule. Il seroit très désirable qu'ils puissent l'échanger contre de modiques possessions. Il faudroit donc leur ouvrir toutes les avenues de la propriété. Or le moyen le plus sûr est la division et la subdivision des terres.⁶³

On the basis of what they considered to be sound economic and social evidence, 50% of the essayists who favoured land reform asserted that, contrary to recent trends and talk about large-scale farming and productivity, 'les grandes terres sont contraires au progrès de l'agriculture'.⁶⁴ Whether their argument in favour of small farms was economic:

C'est une vérité démontrée en rigueur par l'expérience que [toute] proportion gardée, une petite exploitation a un tiers de récolte de

⁶³ Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420.

⁶⁴ AD Marne I J 42 No. 113, Romans de Coppiet, During the revolution Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, head of the Comité de Mendicité, was a powerful exponent of this view. He opposed extensive cultivation in the belief that small plots would both relieve poverty and improve productivity.

plus qu'une grande [qui] a perdu une partie de sa fécondité parce qu'elle n'est plus travaillée en grand comme elle étoit en petit.⁶⁵

or social:

Il est prouvé par des exemples des paroisses nombreuses répandues dans la généralité (the essayist is from Champagne) combien la petite culture étoit la plus favorable à la population d'hommes et de bestiaux et combien les campagnes seroient meublées d'habitans si les gros laboureurs étoient obligés de se borner [...] sans pouvoir réunir nombre d'objets de 4 à 5 arpents qui procureroient une subsistance honnête à toute une famille.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ AD Marne I J 39 No. 25; I J 40 No. 53 and Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 1275. In an argument advanced by a quarter of all the essayists the laboureur Fequant insisted that there were sound economic reasons that the government do all in its power to discourage the trend toward large-scale exploitation. 'Les gros emplois d'agriculture, c'est à dire les labourages de 4, 5, 6 charrues, sont très embarrassants, souvent négligés et difficiles à conduire par le tracas et les inconvéniens dont ils sont susceptibles. Ceux qui les font valoir en propre ou à loyer, dans la vue de profiter d'avantage en sont très souvent dupes parce que le profit est moins grand, relativement à l'exploitation, que si le même employ étoit divisé en deux ou en trois établissemens particuliers [...]. Il est d'expérience que la vente d'un bien fond quelconque produira plus en détail qu'en gros. Il en est de même de toute exploitation [...]. D'où', Fequant ended emphatically, 'on peut conclure qu'il y auroit avantage pour l'Etat et pour le peuple de multiplier les établissemens de labourage.' AD Marne I J 49 No. 23.

The essayists' arguments against large-scale exploitation were surprisingly sophisticated. Rabigot Delacroix said that conversion to large-scale cereal production impoverished a local market in a variety of ways not immediately obvious. Not only did the large-scale producer become the 'tyran de son canton' with his power to monopolize local grain sales either driving up prices or, with recent legislative decontrol, selling his grain on more lucrative markets elsewhere; but, by depriving the microproprietor of his garden, etc., large-scale production reduced the amount of non-cereal produce (vegetables, fruit, chickens, butter, eggs, etc.) sold on the local market. It also reduced the amount of money in circulation locally thereby making it more difficult for the small tenant farmer or microproprietor to 'payer leurs tailles et le loyer'.

In subsequent work I hope to explore the essayists' awareness from their observation of local village economics, of what modern economists would call the 'multiplier effect'. Rabigot wrote, for example: 'l'argent passant par plusieurs mains, en circulant d'avantage, est un bien réel pour l'Etat. Un écu de trois livres qui passe en un jour par cent différentes mains rapporte plus au fisc que cent écus reçus dans un jour par un particulier qui les enferme dans son coffre-fort'. AD Marne I J 39 No. 29.

⁶⁶ Bibliothèque Municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 868. The memoir came from Crespy en Valois and was in all probability written by the subdélégué Be[z]in. He admitted to an insider's knowledge of the ministry's worry about depopulation in the Soissons intendancy and in support of his argument in favour of the division of large properties to

the essayists insisted that the Crown should undertake to reverse recent trends not only by prohibiting further consolidation but actually by breaking up large estates by means of 'une loye agraire' that would return France to 'l'ancienne division et même à une plus grande'.⁶⁷ No less than seventy-four of the competitors used their essays to call upon their young king to recognize that the only lasting way he could respond to the desperate needs of the people and ameliorate the living conditions of the productive classes was 'en faisant plier les droits rigoureux de la propriété du petit nombre aux besoins actuels de la multitude'.⁶⁸

ROYAL REDUCTION OF THE BURDEN OF TRANSFER PAYMENTS

The third general category of reform -- what the economist would call tax reform and in this case, more broadly, a general reduction of transfer payments -- was, like the redistribution of land or management of its use, a reform aimed at the property and privilege of a minority to alleviate the suffering of the majority. Eighty-four or 55% of the competitors advocated reform instigated by the Crown to reduce the transfer payments currently imposed on the productive classes. Included in this category were those who advocated a redistribution of royal taxes so that their burden would fall more equitably upon the members and wealth of all three estates and those who advocated suppression or repurchase of seigneurial and ecclesiastical dues.⁶⁹

be redistributed to poor families, cites chapter 6 of the Châlons Academy's printed résumé for its competition on begging, Les Moyens de détruire la mendicité en France.

⁶⁷ AD Marne I J 39 No. 25.

⁶⁸ Gosselin, Reflexions d'un Citoyen, p. 67.

⁶⁹ Those who favoured non-structural changes, like inheritance, commodity or road taxes -- have not been included in this figure.

The elimination of fiscal privilege was the primary reform aim of these essayists who called upon the Crown to 'établir une égalité de répartition plus générale' so that 'une classe ne seroit pas favorisée tandis qu'une autre seroit surchargée'. The allocation of fiscal dues, 'posée sur une base plus large, diminueroit l'imposition individuelle en raison de sa propagation et de son étendue' and thus 'soulageroit puissamment les habitants de la campagne'.⁷⁰ No order was to be exempt -- most especially not the Church which should be made, these essayists maintained, to 'verser dans les coffres publics [...] en raison des revenus qu'ils ont et des terrains qu'ils occupent'.⁷¹ Nor was any kind of wealth to fall outside the scope of fiscal responsibility. The physiocrats' 'impôt territorial' was rejected as ultimately falling back onto the labouring classes who would be forced to pay it indirectly in heightened land rents.⁷² The essayists contended that the Crown could eliminate its financial problems and aid the labouring classes at the same time by imposing a 'taille proportionnelle' on all forms of wealth -- 'la richesse répartie dans les terres, les fonds publics, dans les affaires et le commerce'.⁷³

⁷⁰ Bibliothèque Municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 1275 and AD Marne I J 40 No. 58. Almost as if to remind his readers, in case they had already forgotten, an unidentified essayist in the competition of 1782 added to his call for the elimination of fiscal privilege: 'ces sortes d'exemption sont contraires au bien public et augmentent la misère commune en favorisant quelques particuliers'. AD Marne I J 49 No. 16.

⁷¹ AD Marne I J 38 Nos 5 and 9. The laboureur Gidoïn explained that access to the enormous wealth of the Church would enable the government to use funds coming from the various religious orders scattered about the country to 'soulager d'abord les communautés et paroisses trop faibles et en second lieu à libérer l'Etat pour autres besoins utiles et nécessaires.' AD marne I J 38 No. 5.

⁷² Gosselin, Réflexions d'un Citoyen, pp. 32-33 and Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 866.

⁷³ AD Marne I J 49 No. 43 and Bibliothèque Municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 866. It is interesting to note the essayists' awareness of the

Directly related to reform of royal taxes was the essayists' appeal to the Crown to reduce the burden on the peasantry that resulted from ecclesiastical and seigneurial dues. 'Qui n'applaudiroit pas au zèle [...] des magistrats chargés de veiller à ce que les intérêts de tous', an essayist demanded defiantly, 's'ils provoquent une loi par laquelle le peuple seroit admis à faire le rachat de tous les devoirs féodaux [...] sous des conditions raisonnables et fixées par le Prince?' According to this plan the Crown would disallow any claim by the seigneurial lord to the collection of dues like the lots et ventes or the banalités and would, in addition, 'accord[er] aux vassaux la faculté de se rédimer une fois pour toutes les droits de cens en offrant aux seigneurs un prix fixe en égard aux circonstances de la commission primordiale'.⁷⁴ Although the essayists

Crown's financial difficulties. The impecunious Comte de Saint Belin from Clermont en Beauvais mentioned among the 'terribles obstacles' to the reform in direct taxes that he advocated, the 'guerre ruineuse dont on ne voit pas de fin'. He indicated that although he considered an immediate reduction of the taille by a third to a half a necessity if the Crown was serious about wanting to reduce the suffering of the popular classes and that he favoured a gradual reduction in the capitation and vingtième as well, he said that he also realized that 'le roy dans les conjunctures présentes ne peut pas faire tant de remises'. AD Marne I J 49 No. 41.

⁷⁴ AD Marne I J 41 No. 98. For further discussion by the essayists of their proposed 'affranchissement' of seigneurial dues (along with their pleas that, if it were not possible to abolish the champart, the Crown oversee its conversion into a payment in money) see AD Marne I J 42 No. 113, I J 49 Nos 2, 4, 20 and 21, I J 50 No. 1 and Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 1275.

Paul François Boncerf, author of the famous Les Inconvénients des droits féodaux (1776) was a competitor in several of the Châlons Academy's competitions, submitting essays on the reform of the fiscal and administrative system (1780), on why peasants were leaving the countryside (1789) and on how to improve the aridity of the soil (posed for 1790). Like the competitors writing for the Academy's contests in 1776 and 1782, Boncerf favoured repurchase of legitimate rights -- that is, those proven by written titles. Without titles, other dues were to be abolished outright, according to the proposals advocated by Boncerf. His work was so influential as to be cited within a few years of its publication by at least one of the Châlons essayists (Rabigot Delacroix in AD Marne I J 39 No. 29).

There was also in the essays -- although these opinions were not included among the essayists calling for a reduction of transfer payments -- a call for suppression of the dîme by the Crown which should then,

who favoured suppression of these dues had little doubt that the seigneur 'ne manqueroit pas d'augmenter ses fermes à proportion', they asserted that this reform might prevent the economically marginal peasant from going under and would, in any case, have an important social and psychological effect on the more substantial farmer who 's'imagineroit être moins chargé et plus heureux' thus eliminating a potent source of discontent among the nation's most productive cultivators.⁷⁵

After arguing persuasively that the rights ascribed to seigneurial lords, whether lay or ecclesiastical, were unjustified by any social service they performed for their tenant 'vassals',⁷⁶ the essayists concluded their plea for royal reform of seigneurial transfer payments with the argument that it was in the Crown's own interest to 'supprimer ou [...] atténuer successivement tous ces devoirs onéreux qui surcharge le Peuple contribuable' because 'le taillable affranchi de ces impôts usurpés par la

according to one curé, see that the parish priest be paid out of local impositions and on the basis of the size and economic situation of his parish. I J 49 No. 43, the curé Aleton. The notary Nausser from Quinson in Provence was another strong advocate of a salaried parish clergy. Still other essayists suggested that the dîme be eliminated but that the Crown should draw the sums necessary to support the parish clergy from ecclesiastical properties that the government would henceforth administer.

⁷⁵ AD Marne I J 49 No. 16. The unidentified writer of this essay emphasized that not only would the cultivator be happier; he would also stay on the land and gradually conditions would improve: 'il s'attacheroit davantage à sa profession; la feroit aimer à ses enfans, et songeroit moins à les enlever à l'état en les mettant au service des riches dans les villes; les campagnes se peupleroient, l'émulation s'y mettroit, le produit des terres augmenteroit, et l'on y verroit bientôt une certaine aisance'.

⁷⁶ The criticism is a common one but see, in particular, AD Marne I J 38 No. 9, I J 39 No. 29, I J 40 No. 70, I J 41 Nos 78, 90 and 97, I J 42 Nos 113 and 114, I J 49 No. 10, Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MSS 866 and 867 and Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420.

force seroit plus en état de payer les impositions légales levées pour le gouvernement de l'Etat'.⁷⁷

PUBLIC RELIEF FOR THE
ILL, OLD AND VERY YOUNG

The final category, and the one that needs the least illustration, is the category of government aid to those unable to work -- the ill, the old and the very young. Relief to these groups was advocated by 98 or 64% of the essayists. Because they represented a mouth to be fed that could contribute little or nothing to its own maintenance, these groups represented, in many cases, an unbearable burden upon fragile family economies.

As the Comité de Mendicité would learn when it began categorizing its poor according to ages, half the beggars swarming across France at the end of the Old Regime were children.⁷⁸ To keep them from begging, the Châlons essayists proposed one of two solutions -- both of which would enable their families to feed them -- either to see that their parents were in receipt of a living wage or to provide family allocations.⁷⁹ The curé Le Tonnelier from Autrèches in Picardy neatly summarized this position:

⁷⁷ That the author of this statement was himself an official of the central government is not surprising; what is unexpected is his open distinction between the legitimate claims of the state upon the individual and the dues claimed unjustifiably by church and seigneur. Clicquot de Blervache, Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420. Emphasis added.

⁷⁸ Camille Bloch and Alexandre Tuetey, eds, Procès-verbaux et rapports du Comité de Mendicité de la Constituante, 1790-1791 (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1911), pp. 572-73.

⁷⁹ The most detailed description of the administrative procedures to be followed in the execution of the essayists' proposed system of family allocations was given by Montlinot who provided samples of the various forms to be filled out by the family requesting aid and by the local authorities providing it. The detailed information about all family members' age, health, working history, etc, requested on this form would be sufficient to satisfy the most exacting modern bureaucrat. AD Marne I J 40 No. 66.

Le point essentiel seroit d'empêcher les enfants de mendier: [...] procur[er] à leurs parents de quoi leur nourrir soit par les travaux dont le salaire peut suffire soit par le supplément de secours [...] et on verroit au bout d'un certain temps la nation des mendiants s'affoiblir et se détruire elle-même.⁸⁰

The essayists were well aware of the enormity of the foundling problem as well and took care to remind those with the power to initiate reforms that without systematic aid these children would inevitably become beggars and thereby criminals.⁸¹ Romans de Coppiet remarked that one-third of all the babies born in Paris in 1776 were abandoned and noted with alarm that the numbers seemed to be increasing.⁸² He and his fellow essayists offered a wide variety of solutions to the mounting problem represented by these children but the consensus view they seemed to share was that the problem could be significantly reduced if families were provided with subsidies and if pregnant women, without respect to their social situation, were given adequate aid to allow them to keep their children. The law professor Roussel de la Berardiére suggested that authorities could reduce the foundling problem if they would 'accord[er] à toute femme de cette classe qui seroit enceinte depuis six mois jusqu'à 18 mois ou deux ans même jusqu'à trois ans après son accouchement une gratification journalière égale à la paye qu'elle recevrait si elle travailloit sur l'atelier'. Such aid, he added, 'subviendrait aux besoins

⁸⁰ AD Marne I J 40 No. 57.

⁸¹ AD Marne I J 39 No. 11. The essayist was the ironmaster Pierre Clement Grignon from Bayard (in the future département of the Haute Marne).

⁸² AD Marne I J 42 No. 113. The Comité de Mendicité estimated that roughly 8,000 children were abandoned each year in Paris in the 1780s. Romans de Coppiet lived in Rouen; it has been estimated that in Rouen and Le Havre together approximately 400 children were abandoned each year in the 1780s. Bloch and Tuetey, Procès-verbaux, p. 549 and AD Seine-Maritime C 1001, quoted by Hufton, The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, pp. 318-19. See in particular Hufton's chapter 'Parent and Child' in *Ibid.*

de la mère et de l'enfant' until such time as the mother could go back to work.⁸³

For those children who were either orphaned or already abandoned (or would be despite the proposed relief measures), the essayists proposed the government assume responsibility for them as 'Enfants de l'Etat'; these children would be nursed, trained and apprenticed either in the agricultural or industrial arts.⁸⁴ The essayists' primary concern was that foundlings be de-institutionalized ('l'hospice des enfants trouvés est le tombeau de l'amour maternel' was a typical comment) and farmed out while still very young to poor families who would receive a subsidy from the government to care for them.⁸⁵ These subsidies would continue until the child was old enough to work and begin earning his keep as a farm hand for the family that was fostering him; however, those who showed aptitude for more technical training were to receive apprenticeships, paid out of public funds.⁸⁶ An alternative solution was to train the most robust male

⁸³ AD Marne I J 41 No. 78.

⁸⁴ AD Marne I J 38 No. 11. Grignon was not simply a forge master. He was a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Inscriptions in Paris and also, later, of the Châlons Academy. He was passionately interested in the perfection of iron smelting techniques and a questionnaire he drew up about techniques currently being followed in other iron works was circulated by Trudaine through the intendants in 1773 to forgemasters throughout France. His suggestion that the government put these 'enfants d'Etat' out as apprentices to masters in manufacturing was no idle suggestion for this essayist was throughout his life actively involved in practical matters related to commerce and manufacturing. He competed in the Châlons Academy's competitions on begging and on commerce. I am grateful to Mme Anne-Marie Cuvret of the departmental archives of the Haute-Marne for having referred me to the article by Dr Henri Ronot, 'Un industriel humaniste au XVIII^e siècle: P.-Cl. Grignon' in the Cahiers Haut-Marnais, No. 116 (1974), 49-54.

⁸⁵ AD Marne I J 41 Nos 96 and 97. The author of the first, whose initials were MNGL was from Guebwiller in Alsace, the second, who remains completely unidentified, seems from internal evidence to have been a parish priest. The quotation is from Romans de Coppier, AD Marne I J 42 No. 113.

⁸⁶ AD Marne I J 38 No. 11, I J 41 No. 93 (from the aged curé Cassan, from the village of Reilhaquet en Quercy, 'route de Toulouse') and I J 42

foundlings for a career in the military; after formal training (a maréchaussée officer essayist suggests they could be sent to artillery school), their obligation to the state was to be discharged by extended military service with, after at least twenty-four years of military service, the possibility of an 'inheritance' from the state in the form of a land grant taken from the royal domain, which was to be theirs free of all taxes for eighteen years. Such a system would be doubly useful to the state, according to this essayist, who described himself as 'un militaire très peu lettré': it would 'procure[r] des défrichements utiles pour l'Etat, et des peuplades des braves gens qui multiplieroient leur espèce'.⁸⁷

The state's responsibility to the old and infirm who had worn themselves out labouring for the nation was even more forcefully argued by the Châlons essayists. In the words of a procureur at the admiralty court at Cherbourg:

Ce que le Gouvernement fait pour les vieux militaires, pour les marins qui sont hors d'état de servir, pour les officiers couverts de

Nos 111, 112, 113 and 122.

⁸⁷ AD Marne I J 40 Nos 58, 65 and 73, I J 41 Nos 91 and 96 and I J 42 No. 110. The option of military education for foundlings was favoured most particularly by two maréchaussée officers, Charles Gabriel Delabalne, whom we have already encountered, and by Marchand de Burbure. Delabalne wrote: 'De toutes les professions il n'en est peut-être point qui convienne mieux à un jeune homme de l'espèce surtout dont il s'agit [les enfants trouvés] que la profession des armes. C'est celle ainsi que l'Etat qui lui a servi de père est plus en droit de demander de sa reconnaissance. Tout enfant abandonné de père, de mère, et qui est sans parent appartient à l'Etat'. AD Marne I J 40 No. 58. Marchand de Burbure, whose wife was from Châlons and who was himself an 'associé libre' of the Châlons Academy, submitted two essays to the judgement of the Academy: one on the plight of the beggar and one for its later competition on commerce. He was from Silley-le-Guillaume in the future department of the Sarthe. In addition to being an advocate of education for foundlings, Burbure also wanted to establish schools for military education for the children of officers who were excluded from the École royale militaire and even for the children of ordinary soldiers. All this was to be funded, he stipulated, from the revenues currently enjoyed by monasteries which were to be taken over gradually by the state. AD Marne I J 41 No. 73.

blessures, il peut le faire également pour ceux qui ont usé leurs corps, leurs bras et leurs santé à labourer la terre qui nourrit tous les sujets de l'Etat.⁸⁸

'Leur tribut est payé à la société', agreed another essayist. Henceforth, 'c'est au gouvernement à leur tendre une main secourable et à les prendre sous sa protection'.⁸⁹ Most of the many essayists advocating government-supervised aid for those no longer able to work spoke of society's obligation to them in these terms. But, as usual, it was Rabigot Delacroix who drew perhaps the clearest and most convincing picture of their utter dependency on public assistance even after, and indeed, because of a lifetime of hard labour:

Il est impossible que l'homme qui travaille à la journée puisse jamais amasser la moindre chose. Et si sa carrière le conduit malheureusement jusqu'à la vieillesse, il faudra qu'il mendie après avoir travaillé pendant des quarante ou cinquante ans qu'il aura passés et vécu dans l'indigence.⁹⁰

Yet, despite long years of service to the state, when they were forced by absolute need to beg, the indigent old were among those most despised: The 'pauvres de la campagne' were, in the ringing words of Rabigot Delacroix 'la classe la plus à plaindre'.

L'on voit souvent que quand ces nourriciers des etats sont épuisés par le travail et qu'ils ne peuvent plus arroser la terre de leurs sueurs precieuses, tomber dans la mendicité et la plus grand abandon. Et ce qu'il y a de plus horrible: c'est qu'ils sont méprisés, persecutés'.

And yet it was these worn-out labourers who most merited the attention of the state.

Et qui mérite mieux de la République, que ces hommes vraiment respectables? tous leurs jours n'ont-ils pas été marqués, soit par

⁸⁸ AD Marne I J 49 No. 36, Groult.

⁸⁹ AD Marne I J 38 No. 8. The lieutenant de police Decan of Meaux provided another excellent statement of this obligation. AD Marne I J 39 No. 24.

⁹⁰ AD Marne I J 39 No. 29.

des travaux, soit par des peines qui, toutes ont tourné au profit de l'Etat?

To continue to abandon its duty to these poor, would be to disregard a sacred obligation. And by its treatment of the indigent old the government would, he warned, be persuading young people who might otherwise have stayed on the land to abandon that state in fear that they, too, would be abandoned in their old age.⁹¹

The 'soulagement de ces trois classes' -- the ill, the old, the very young -- was in the view of these essayists one of society's most undeniable responsibilities. 'C'est indispensable [...] un vol, un sacrilège d'y manquer',⁹² one essayist wrote indignantly. The hospital doctor Louis Clouet from Verdun, who won the Academy's prize for his essay on the begging poor, put his case in less dramatic language using terms that sound surprisingly modern. Public assistance for those unable to support themselves through work was one of the fundamental laws of life in society for 'dans l'ordre économique il faut que le travail des forts compense le défaut des foibles qui sont hors d'état de gagner leur vie par le travail. Ces principes' were, he asserted, 'incontestables, puisqu'ils ont pour fondement les lois mêmes de la société'.⁹³

Clouet's words sum up perhaps the most striking fact that emerges from the Châlons essays. The men submitting their views to the Academy for these contests shared a vision of their society that was first and foremost

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² AD Marne I J 38 No. 9. The essayist Bourdier de Beauregard expressed his opinion on this matter as follows: 'Celuy des citoyens qui est hors d'état de servir sa patrie et de contribuer par son travail au bien de la société n'en a pas moins le droit d'exiger les secours qui luy sont nécessaires pour subsister. On ne peut sans manquer aux droits les plus sacrés les luy refuser; semblable à un père de famille qui jette toujours ses regards sur les plus foibles de ses enfans, la patrie doit s'occuper des plus foibles de ses citoyens.' AD Marne I J 40 No. 54.

⁹³ AD Marne I J 42 No. 114.

of an 'ordre économique'. These essayists understood that what mattered to the poor man and his family was whether they had enough work to keep them in bread. The reforms these unpractised authors advocated, like the provisions they recommended for funding them, ignored careful moral or social distinctions between good and bad, rich and poor or taxable and privileged income. The poor like the rich, or at least the comfortably well-off who were able to help them, were in the eyes of these essayists separated by economic differences that far outweighed in importance the careful social gradations that preoccupied the upwardly mobile savant of the High Enlightenment or the self-righteous charity of the almsgiver over-discriminating in pitiful largesse to the 'deserving' poor. Before offering solutions to the question posed by the Academy, the Châlons essayists focused on the social and economic causes of poverty. And, having exposed these, they then offer remedies that required nothing less than revolutionary reforms in the social and economic structure, reforms which they believed offered the only means by which the Crown could halt the prevailing process of proletarianization among the labouring classes and assume its proper role in coordinating society's responsibility for the indigent.

FUNDING

The essayists' reform solutions were designed first to halt the economic polarization of society into rich and poor by relieving the subsistence farmer of the unjustified burdens laid upon him and, second, preventing the pauperization of micro-proprietors and purely wage labourers by providing them with work, tools, raw materials and education, by supervising prices and wages, and granting aid to families with dependent children or adults. Clearly the funds required to finance such an extensive programme of

reforms required more revenue than had henceforth been available for either relief or repression. Fifteen percent of the essayists, agreeing with the others that some structural economic reforms were absolutely necessary, nevertheless despaired, with the curé de Louvement from Minnecourt near Vitry, that 'je ne peux trouver la vraie solution que dans les fonds que je n'apperois nulle part'.⁹⁴ However, a full 70% of the essayists insisted that these funds could be found if the Crown authorized involuntary public funding of systematic poor relief through some form of taxation -- 'ce n'est que par voye de contribution et non d'aumônes qu'on peut venir à bout de tirer les fonds nécessaires à cette entreprise',⁹⁵ -- and through appropriation of land or revenue of properties currently not within the public domain.

The plight of the poor majority could only be ameliorated, in the view of the curé Gaillard and almost three-quarters of the competitors, if the public authorities intervened to supervise a transfer of resources from the rich and comfortable to the needy labouring poor. 'C'est de la bourse de l'opulent qui doivent sortir des ressources', Gaillard insisted. Reforms that were not grounded in that truth were doomed to failure before they began, he continued, because experience and reason clearly indicated that 'le bien particulier souffre presque toujours de l'accroissement du bien public; en général l'un ne peut gagner que l'autre n'y perde'. Realistic assessment of the enormity and gravity of public emiseration would, he and his fellow essayists argued, force even the most cautious eventually to concede that the welfare of the labouring poor could only be secured at the expense of the affluent: 'il est [...] très difficile de proposer dans quelques genres que ce soit un plan général qui tend au

⁹⁴ AD Marne I J 38 No. 22.

⁹⁵ AD Marne I J 41 No. 90.

soulagement des malheureux et s'accorde avec les intérêts de celui qui est opulent'.⁹⁶

Only 15% of the essayists believed that existing resources, if administered systematically, would suffice to remedy the problem of the poor. Far more common was the majority view that state supervision of a transfer of wealth was the only realistic alternative if the economic situation of the labouring poor were to be made viable. Even two of the most cautious essayists, Clouet of Verdun and the collège teacher Sabbathier, were adamant in their insistence on this point. Both forcefully expressed the view, common in the essays, that it was the Crown's duty to 'remédier à ce mal politique, en rapprochant, autant qu'il est en luy, les extrêmes' and 'égaliser les inégalités [...] qui se trouvent entre les citoyens'.⁹⁷

As we have seen, the primary means of reversing the economic polarization of society suggested by the essayists was by reducing transfer payments, redistributing the tax burden, and supervising the purchase, leasing or management of large estates, subdivided for farming by the small cultivator. Aid in the form of tax relief or the reduction in other transfer payments, the essayists calculated, would require no substantial public expenditure and, although it would compel the Crown to assert a reformist will it had heretofore only tentatively demonstrated, the essayists affirmed their belief that the authority to legislate these reforms rested within the power and will of the Crown.

More central, however, to the present analysis of the essayists' discussion of funding and to their calculation of where large sums could be found were the prescriptions, admonitions and formulas they offered the

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ AD Marne I J 40 No. 70 and I J 42 No. 114.

Crown in support of appropriating Church wealth for public use. Thirty-five percent of the essayists urged the government to recover for poor relief the ecclesiastical wealth originally intended for that purpose. 'Les pauvres ont un patrimoine existant et réel', wrote the lawyer Aubert from Nancy, 'qu'ils sont en droit de revendiquer par l'organe du ministère public',⁹⁸ The essayists insisted that between a quarter and a third of all ecclesiastical revenue should be taken over by the Crown. One-quarter was the figure most commonly mentioned by essayists of all three estates, with lower clergymen among them citing canon law to prove it. Indeed, the conviction was so deeply held that even Clouet remarked impatiently, 'pourquoi donc le Ministère public n'en prend-t-il pas connoissance? Pourquoi ne revendique-t-il pas le bien des pauvres dont il est le protecteur et le tuteur?'⁹⁹ But assuming responsibility for the administration of funds in the hands of the Church for the use of the poor for whom they were originally destined was only the first task these essayists would assign the Crown. They also exhorted their king and his ministers to appropriate vacant or near vacant monasteries and other buildings belonging to the Church for public use, transforming them into sites to house training schools, ateliers, and havens for the homeless destitute. They also wanted the Crown to assume directorship of other properties belonging to regular and upper secular clergy and did so on the grounds that those currently inhabiting them were socially and financially parasitic.¹⁰⁰ The future delegate to the Estates General Trumeau de

⁹⁸ AD Marne I J 41 No. 89.

⁹⁹ AD Marne I J 42 No. 114. See also I J 41 Nos 90, 95 and 97, and I j 42 Nos 112 and 113.

¹⁰⁰ AD Marne I J 40 No. 64 and Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 1275. The author of the former essay was Jean François Antoine de Serres de Mesples, president of the Cour des comptes, aides et finances of Montpellier.

Lierne from Issoudon in Berry, in a tone typical of the Châlons competitors writing on these matters, remarked that France teemed with such buildings: 'les provinces de ce royaume fourmillent de couvents, monastères, abbayes &c' which could be put to good use as workshops and schools; and Sabbathier added sardonically that since 'dans un siècle éclairé il n'y a que l'utilité publique qui puisse assurer l'existence [...] des riches monastères, ainsi les mettre à portée d'être utiles c'est leur rendre un service réel'.¹⁰¹ The essayists submitted, further, that 'en les gérant en son nom le gouvernement' would not only find an enormous and readily available resource for funding public assistance; it would also be asserting authority over an order that had for too long used its property and privilege to 'se mêle[r] d'affaires temporelles'.¹⁰² To those who

¹⁰¹ AD Marne I J 40 Nos 59 and 70. Louis XV's policies which raised the age at which monks could take their vows and be given a benefice and his appropriation of the property of suppressed religious orders had made a profound impression on the Châlons essayists to whom it signalled the royal willingness to assume authority over the immense property and wealth of the French Church. Sabbathier commented: 'On a déjà supprimé, et on paraît être dans l'intention d'éteindre encore, des maisons religieuses dans les campagnes'. For further indication of the revolutionary significance for these essayists of recent reforms touching ecclesiastical property see AD Marne I J 38 No. 11, I J 39 Nos. 28 and 36, I J 40 Nos. 50, 70 and 78 and I J 41 Nos 89, 96 and 97.

Professor McManners in his study of the Church and its wealth in eighteenth-century Angers notes that by the last decade or so of the Old Regime, schemes explicitly calling for the appropriation of ecclesiastical property had become a commonplace of local politics as Angers engaged in what he describes as a sort of 'dress rehearsal' for the revolutionary sale of monastic property. McManners, French Ecclesiastical Society under the Ancien Regime, pp. 128 and 118. Many of the Châlons essayists would quite obviously have been willing actors in this aspect of the coming drama.

¹⁰² AD Marne I J 41 No. 97. 'Ne sera-t-il pas permis de former des vœux à l'effet qu'aucun Religieux ne se mesle d'affaires temporelles [...]. L'on trouvera sans doute surprenant qu'un corps de Religieux fasse valoir les revenus de leur abbé et s'exempte des charges publics; en les gérant en son nom le Gouvernement de ces biens laisseroit aux laïcs des occupations qui leurs sont dévolues.'

The Academy noted in a marginal comment on this essay: 'L'auteur de ce mémoire paroît avoir saisi le véritable point de la difficulté; et, à l'exception des quelques sorties un peu trop vives contre les maisons religieuses, toutes ses réflexions paroissent sages et judicieuses; et il seroit à désirer que le moyen qu'il propose put être adopté.'

would object that Crown management of ecclesiastical land 'seroit attaquer les propriétés et mettre le main à l'encensoir', the Caen law professor Roussel de la Berardière, after reassuring his readers that 'personne ne respecte plus que moi les propriétés', had a ready reply:

Il est facile à répondre à toutes deux en même tems. Il est bien vrai que les ecclésiastiques bénéficiers soient propriétaires de leurs biens; je ne dis pas du fonds; mais des fruits du revenu de leurs bénéfices. Ils n'étoient autrefois que de simples usuraires: ils sont devenus usufruitiers [...]. Le vivre et le vêtir du bénéficière prélevé, le reste appartient aux pauvres. Les biens du clergé sont immenses. Il sera donc juste d'en appliquer une portion à l'entretien et à la nourriture des pauvres.¹⁰³

The Crown was also advised to use its authority to consolidate the revenue formerly belonging to foundations, hospitals and bureaux de charité¹⁰⁴ and to forbid the distribution of informal relief through private alms.¹⁰⁵ More than three quarters of the essayists were critical of previous and present systems of formal and informal relief. But the reasons given for their criticism were wholly different from those suggested by the philosophes who, viewing both the poor and the Church from a disdainful height, focused their criticism of informal parish relief through the lens of anti-clericalism to accuse Catholic charity of contributing to the moral decline of the poor by encouraging them to live off the largesse of others.¹⁰⁶ The objections to existing procedures

¹⁰³ AD Marne I J 41 No. 78.

¹⁰⁴ AD Marne I J 40 No. 70 and I J 49 No. 43.

¹⁰⁵ Edicts forbidding almsgiving were to precede those instructing citizens to contribute to a mandatory imposition because, as the former naval officer Nas de Tourris wrote from Marseille, forbidding alms was 'le seul moyen de pouvoir établir un règlement fixe pour le distribution permanente, proportionnée et équitable' of public relief. AD Marne I J 40 No. 61. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁶ For discussion of the Enlightenment's indictment of Catholic poor relief see Olwen Hufton, 'Towards an Understanding of the Poor of Eighteenth-Century France', French Government and Society, pp. 145-165.

and resources for the distribution of formal and informal relief which were raised by the Châlons essayists were those of men who had close, personal knowledge both of the problems involved in its application and of the men and women who were -- or, regrettably, were not -- in receipt of assistance. Their criticism of previous systems of formal and informal relief was both moral and economic. While recognizing that the original intent of Christian charity had been -- and on the parish level often continued to be -- genuine and commendable, such informal relief nevertheless failed, these essayists maintained, because while assuaging the consciences of donors, it permitted them to ignore the fundamental social and economic causes of poverty and indigence. The essayists were also convinced that previous systems of formal and informal relief had failed because the separate resources of public and private charity were manifestly inadequate to meet the omnipresent needs of the poor they saw everywhere about them.¹⁰⁷ The personal impact of the problem of poverty on these essayists and their conviction of the total inadequacy of existing resources was perhaps best conveyed by the curé Aleton from Maraine au Maine, who after thirty-two years as parish priest sent the Academy this anguished testimony:

Nous pasteurs allons inquiets voir nos pauvres et nous en revenons gémissans de notre impuissance. Il leur faudroit alimens, remèdes, lits, linges et surtout aux misérables femmes en couche. Tout cela ne nous est [pas] possible: et ce que nous pouvons leur faire est autant de privations pour les familles [...] indigentes. [...] les hôpitaux, les seigneurs, les curés, les personnes charitables sont épuisés.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Professor Hufton reminds us that in the writings that emerged from the anti-clerical Enlightenment Catholic relief was criticized for being indiscriminate but that the deeper economic implications of mass poverty were ignored because the philosophes's criticism was based on the premise that existing resources were adequate to need if properly administered. Hufton, 'The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France' in Bosher, pp. 147-48.

¹⁰⁸ AD Marne I J 49 No. 43.

Working with, for, and among the poor as parish priests, police, magistrates and municipal officers, the Châlons essayists entertained no illusions about the adequacy of existing resources. As the lawyer Toise Prioul wrote from Paris,

Puisque le nombre des mendiants est immense, puisque leur misère est extrême et s'offre partout à nos yeux, on est forcé de reconnaître que les aumônes tout abondantes qu'elles peuvent être ne suffisent pas à leurs besoins et qu'il est indispensable d'y suppléer.¹⁰⁹

Thus, although the essayists called for a rationalization of existing charitable resources, it was not because they believed these resources would then be adequate to meet the needs of the true poor, but rather to bring public assistance under the authority of the Crown which would henceforth supervise the assessment and administration of obligatory 'contributions' or taxes collected specifically for poor relief or designated for that purpose from revenues collected as office or land taxes, commodity or inheritance taxes or tolls.¹¹⁰ The intent of such a system was that henceforth 'l'universalité des pauvres répandus sur chacun des points de la surface du Royaume soit comprise sous un commun régime de soins et de surveillance'.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ AD Marne I J 39 No. 28. This essayist gave, as identification on the chit accompanying his essay: 'avocat à l'hôtel Notre Dame, rue des Rosiers au Marais à Paris'. His signature may read 'Toise Prioul', which is how Malvaux interpreted it when citing him in the printed résumé of 1780 or it may be, as it appears to the present reader, 'de la Joise Prious'. Under neither spelling have the Paris archives thus far rendered up any further information on this essayist.

¹¹⁰ Excise taxes on luxury goods like wines and spirits or import duties on foreign manufactured goods -- all to be used to fund poor relief -- were frequently cited by the essayists as a supplement to land and revenue taxes used to transfer wealth from rich to poor. Discussion of excise and import duties can be found in Gosselin, Réflexions d'un Citoyen, p. 33, AD Marne I J 39 No. 48, I J 40 No. 59 and I J 41 No. 76, I J 38 No. 3 and I J 41 No. 89.

¹¹¹ Lambert, Objet d'une importance capitale, p. 5.

The essayists' almost regimental turn to the Crown to grant its authority to enforce systematic contributions to poor relief was less naïve than it might seem. Although it was perhaps naïve to expect the Crown to revolutionize the tax structure to 'obliger les riches à pourvoir aux besoins de leurs frères indigens', as the country curate François Boillet suggested, it was sound economics to remind the Crown, as he did, that 'ceux qui possèdent les fonds de l'Etat doivent et peuvent seuls supporter les charges de l'Etat'.¹¹² Far more sophisticated in his thinking and able to cite the authority of the Abbé de Saint Pierre, the academician Romans de Coppier nevertheless shared the simple parish priest's conclusion: 'celui qui est dans l'extrême pauvreté a donc, pour me servir des expressions de l'Abbé de Saint Pierre, un droit réel et positif, une action de droit naturel sur le riche; sa grande misère fait son droit et un droit incontestable'.¹¹³ Helpless to do more than temporarily relieve the grinding poverty and misery of those whom either professional duty or conscience obliged them to serve, these writers had been borne down by the conviction that 'nos maux sont de nature à ne pouvoir être adoucis que par la puissance roiale'.¹¹⁴

¹¹² AD Marne I J 40 No. 62. Boillet wrote: 'La disproportion des richesses qui augmente de plus en plus, par l'inconduite des uns, par l'avidité ou l'industrie des autres, plonge les uns dans la misère tandis que les autres regorgent des richesses. Il est alors, d'un prince attentif au bonheur de ses sujets de rétablir l'ordre, en obviant à une trop grande inégalité'. Crown intervention to reestablish something approaching equality was, in his view, 'le moyen le plus simple, le plus juste et le plus naturel [...]. Je crois cette maxime incontestable,' he wrote the Academy, adding 'c'est sans doute le but que vous vous proposez d'examiner'.

¹¹³ AD Marne I J 42 No. 113.

¹¹⁴ AD Marne I J 49 No. 43.

Royal intervention was needed, they insisted, because only the Crown could oblige the rich by law and without exception to pay a poor tax.¹¹⁵ Citing as precedent edicts of 1693, 1709 and 1740 these writers called upon the Crown to impose a tax on the urban and rural property of privileged and unprivileged alike (excepting those listed as pauvre in the rolls of the taille)¹¹⁶ and upon the hidden wealth of what one of their number described as 'l'industrie des bourgeois'.¹¹⁷ Taxing all without exception and without regard to previous privileged dispensations was, in their view, not merely central but crucial to the successful funding of

¹¹⁵ English poor laws and rates seem to have had surprisingly little influence on the essayists. Although six of them make mention (and not always favourably) of the English example -- AD Marne I J 38 No. 11, I J 40 No. 67, I J 42 Nos. 112, 113, 114 and 123 -- a more important influence, judging by their references to it, appears to have been the procedures followed in the Low Countries, especially the practice of making public accounts of collections. Montlinot writes in favour of public accounts: 'C'est en vain que l'on m'objecteroit que l'aumône doit estre secrette et volontaire. Hommes riches et pervers, je ne vous demande que les miettes qui tombent de votre table et ce que j'exige, peut-être n'est pas la vingtième partie de ce que vous devez aux pauvres, à la religion, à l'état et à l'humanité'. AD Marne I J 40 No. 66. I J 39 No. 41, I J 40 Nos 64, 66 and 60, I J 42 Nos. 112, 114 and 123 all make favourable mention of procedures followed in the Low Countries. There was, however, one great anglophile among the essayists, Romans de Coppier, who in his essay declared: 'Notre anglomanie se bornera-t-elle toujours à la liberté de penser, n'ambitionnera-t-elle la façon d'agir? François, soyez anglois pour la bienfaisance [...]. Les Anglais sont le peuple de l'Europe chez qui l'humanité affligée trouve les plus grands secours'. AD Marne I J 42 No. 113.

¹¹⁶ AD Marne I J 38 No. 6, I J 40 Nos 62, 67 and 70, I J 50 No. 2.

¹¹⁷ AD Marne I J 38 No. 6. This essayist, the former cavalry officer Jean-Louis Dubois, seigneur of Escordal in the Ardennes, is a good example of a member of the old nobility who favoured imposition of a tax on all wealth, regardless of the order of its possessor, as contribution to the universal obligation to fund public assistance. He wrote: 'tout le monde sans exceptions sera obligé de payer à proportion de ses facultés. Une partie sera levée sur les fonds de terre, et le reste sur l'industrie des Bourgeois aisés. D'abord on prendra sur les biens communaux le tiers de cette somme, et comme l'église est la plus intéressé à nourrir ses enfans on prendra sur les biens ecclésiastiques un autre tiers, et le reste sera répartie comme je viens de le dire plus haut. Pour les villes on mettra imposition sur les maisons tant ecclésiastiques qu'autres, les couvents et chapitres tant d'hommes que de femmes paieront comme les autres bourgeois à proportion de leur fortune.'

public assistance. To undertake anything less, the maréchaussée office Delabalme wrote, was to 'glisser sur le mal sans le déraciner'. Delabalme, who described himself in his essay as a man 'chargé par état du maintien de la sûreté publique', had been professionally involved in the enforcement of previous government ordonnances which had attempted to deal with the poor by repressive means and with inappropriate and inadequate funding. So convinced was he of the futility and inhumanity of previous policies, that in his essay for the Châlons Academy he emerges as one of the staunchest supporters of a national system of public assistance funded by a universal and permanent poor tax as the only means of obtaining funds adequate to address the problems of the poor. 'Quant aux fonds à faire pour la dépense en général', Delabalme wrote, it must be

statué par le Gouvernement que toute personne, tant ecclésiastique que laïque, noble ou non noble, tous corps ou communautés réguliers ou séculiers ayant des maisons dans les villes, ou bien fonds dans les dites paroisses [...] seroit tenue de contribuer à la caisse du dit bureau au sou le livre des deux tiers des revenus qu'ils ont en chaque ville ou paroisse, au payment de la somme qui aura été jugée nécessaire pour la subsistance, entretien et pansements de ces pauvres enregistrés dans chaque bureau, en sorte que chaque propriétaire paye sa part de la dépense, à proportion de ce que les deux tiers de leurs propriétés dans chaque corporation en doivent porter, en égard de la totalité de la dépense.¹¹⁸

Based principally on the land, the funds collected from this poor tax should be used as much as possible, Delabalme recommended, within the region from which the sums were drawn (this was in part because of the experience, shared and expressed by several of the essayists, that once funds had transferred into the hands of middlemen from outside a locality, they either disappeared or were severely diminished). Nor were those whose wealth was liquid rather than land to be exempted. Clicquot de Blervache used his Châlons essay to remind the Crown that thus far

¹¹⁸ AD Marne I J 40 No. 58.

les possesseurs d'argent ou du signe de l'argent qui le représente, [...] le possesseur d'un riche portefeuille qui jouit de cent, de deux cent mille livres d'argent sans aucun travail, sans aucune industrie, sans aucune causalité [...] n'ont pas contribué proportionnellement aux charges publique.¹¹⁹

Assessment of the tax was to be made locally, following national guidelines roughly related to local need.¹²⁰ Local authorities, secular and ecclesiastical, were to exercise joint responsibility in drawing up the lists both of those obliged to pay the tax and of the poor in need of temporary and permanent assistance. Periodically these lists were to undergo systematic and scrupulous revision.¹²¹

Funds collected locally for poor relief were to be supplemented by taxes assessed for the construction of public roads, by sums formerly paid out as salaries for maréchaussée officers and for the dépôts, and by tax rebates from the Crown¹²² which through the subdélégués and Intendants would coordinate the use and distribution of central funds, supervising the

¹¹⁹ Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420.

¹²⁰ Like Delabalne, Montlinot advocated the imposition of a real estate tax on all buildings in urban centres. But Montlinot wanted this extended not just to those owning their properties, but also those in rented premises as well. 'Je n'en excepte ni les hôtels, ni les communautés religieuses, édifices publics, académies, collèges, tout sera soumis à l'impôt.' Because this tax was to fall on rental property as well, Montlinot provided in his essay an elaborate schedule of urban rents (acknowledging that the French noble and bourgeois penchant for conspicuous consumption made a tax tied to what they paid as rent an effective measure of their wealth); however, he also suggested that 'toutes les maisons, toutes les locations au dessous de loyer des 125 livres ordinairement occupés par des pauvres ne seront pas soumises à la taxe.' Montlinot's suggestion for assessing the tax on rural property is equally interesting because he wanted the peasants not only to agree upon the assessment but also to have a deliberative voice in its expenditure. AD Marne I J 40 No. 66. Clicquot de Blervache also specifically mentioned the right earned by peasant taxpayers to participate in local deliberative meetings about expenditure. Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420.

¹²¹ On the manner in which tax rolls were to be drawn up see AD Marne I J 40 Nos 67 and 70 and I J 42 No. 101.

¹²² AD Marne I J 38 Nos 7 and 11, I J 40 No. 50, I J 41 Nos. 86 and 89, I J 49 Nos 8, 17, 26, 36, I J 50 No. 2 and Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420.

transfer of funds from more prosperous areas to areas of greater need based upon the number of poor workers to be employed and the number unable to work and to be aided in each community and generality:

L'état des pauvres à soulager étant constaté dans chaque département, ainsy que le produit des contributions, on en fera une division par tête pour que chaque bureau partage la masse générale commune du Royaume en raison du nombre des pauvres dont il sera chargé et des accidens imprévus d'incendie, d'inondation, etc, auxquels il faudra pourvoir.¹²³

The inclusion here of the need for emergency funds in response to natural disasters is another indication of just how rooted in life and its eventualities these writers were.

Seventy-three percent of those who advocated publicly funded projects to provide work for the unemployed argued that purely local work projects would be insufficient and that provincial and regional authorities would need to coordinate information and funds so that when work in agriculture or in private workshops, in road-building or other projects of public utility was not available locally or was inadequate to occupy all the unemployed of an economically depressed region, the Crown could intervene to see that the unemployed were assisted in getting work in nearby regions or in non-residential workshops specifically designed to employ the jobless. This provision in the essays indicates once again the essayists' conviction that the problem of the unemployed and helpless poor had become so great that it was futile to expect local authorities to be able to contain it. 'Il faut que de toute nécessité', an essayists wrote in 1776,

¹²³ AD Marne I J 38 No. 11. On the movement of funds between regions see also AD Marne I J 40 No. 68. Common, too, were statements in the essays requesting the orderly redistribution of funds between wealthy and poor parishes in large towns. See, for examples the essays by C. van Beughem, priest and principal of the collège at Courtrai, 'cinq lieues de Lille', in Flanders and by the Chevalier de Nas de Tourris, a retired naval officer and noble from Marseille (AD Marne I J 39 No. 38 and I J 40 No. 61 respectively).

'le Gouvernement se charge en quelque sorte de cette administration. [...]
C'est une affaire d'Etat à laquelle il faut que le Souverain attache sa
protection.'¹²⁴

Apologetic about their lack of familiarity with the learned treatises and philosophic works of enlightened discourse and even about their style and spelling, these for the most part unpractised essayists relied upon the immediacy of their own experience for authority. Unassuming -- 'Ne croyez pas, Messieurs, que je prétende au prix en me mettant parmi la foule des prétendants. Un vicaire de campagne sans cesse occupé des malheureux n'a pas tant d'ambition'¹²⁵ -- they nevertheless ventured to express views that contradicted the Enlightenment's optimistic forecasts of prosperity and progress for the French nation and refuted its equally optimistic contention that alms, if well-administered by secular authorities, would suffice to relieve the suffering of the nation's true poor. The powerful and the privileged might embrace the promises of the prophets of the new prosperity or be convinced that reason would one day free all men from the shackles of centuries of darkness, but these essayists were persuaded that poverty and adversity -- and not prosperity and happiness -- were what were central to the experience of the majority of Frenchmen. Indigence and begging were in their view national phenomena of such magnitude that society, sooner or later, would have to admit to the inadequacy of existing social and economic mechanisms and consider reforms that recognized how the

¹²⁴ AD Marne I J 41 No. 83.

¹²⁵ AD Marne I J 40 No. 62, the parish curate François Boillet. Even after the reform of 1768 Boillet himself would only have been earning 200 livres a year and that only if he renounced all other possible sources of clerical income. On the portion congrue for priests and vicars see Marcel Marion, Dictionnaire des institutions de la France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles (Paris, A. & J. Picard, 1972), pp. 445-46.

combined effect of demographic, social and economic pressures was contributing to the emiseration of so many. The essays in reform which emerged from their unskilled pens therefore went far beyond a narrow consideration of temporary measures to contain the beggar. In very unacademic, discursive essays that ranged across the breadth of the social and economic discontent which they themselves had witnessed, these writers made a compelling case for France's poor, pleading with their sovereign to institute fundamental structural reforms that would acknowledge the social and economic contributions of the labouring classes and arrest the forces making paupers of the people.

The essayists' analyses of the causes of poverty were personal and particular; yet, a systematic reading and compilation of the opinions of these Frenchmen, disparate in social, economic, intellectual and geographic origin, reveals a consensus view of French society that was quite unlike that of most enlightened Frenchmen of their day. These essayists shared the conviction first, that the labouring poor represented not only the numerical majority in the nation but also its principal source of economic strength; second, that the condition of these poor was both socially unjust and, increasingly, economically untenable; third, that their misery and discontent contained the seeds of potentially grave but ultimately justifiable social and economic disorder; and, fourth, that the Crown was the only power capable of mediating the inequities of a nation dividing against itself into rich and poor. They called on their sovereign, first, to reform the institutional structure that permitted fiscal privilege and fostered economic inequality and exploitation and, then, to intervene

whenever necessary to safeguard the subsistence and therefore the labour and the very existence of his people.¹²⁶

Their social and economic vision was a far cry from the laissez-faire, laissez-passer of physiocrats like Mercier de Rivière and Mirabeau who wanted all men to be subjected to the competition of a free market and who regarded the wage labourer as something less than a citizen, almost less than a man: 'L'ouvrier est un homme qui ne fait point nécessairement corps avec la nation', Mercier de la Rivière wrote in his Ordre naturel et

¹²⁶ A note of caution should be added. The quantification of the essayists' views represented in the tables in this chapter has been undertaken in order to provide an indication -- as precise as possible -- of the content and direction of the complex of opinions contained in these two sets of contest essays. Although there is definite consensus among the essays about the structural, demographic and social causes of poverty, the consensus, real and apparent, among the essayists about the remedies to popular suffering is much less monolithic than the impression given by the raw figures and much less doctrinaire than would appear from the narrative account. The passages from the essays selected to illustrate the opinions represented by the figures were those which employed the clearest arguments and the most convincing language with which to frame their advocacy of a particular reform. Those essayists who made unemployment a cause of popular suffering almost invariably saw some sort of job creation as a solution and so their essays count as ones advocating the creation of new employment opportunities; and yet, their essays, which may in fact be only extremely fragmentary, may not -- and frequently do not -- make a well-argued and lucid case for job creation. They may well give only a nod, vigorous or not, in that direction. The vigour -- though real and reasoned in the essays cited -- may be only a movement towards a clear and conscious understanding of the implications of such a reform in the majority of those essays counted as favouring intervention in the particular sector being discussed.

The social scientist, whose job is in part to quantify frequency and direction of expressed opinion, will perhaps be satisfied with the reality behind the figures presented in Tables III, IV, V and VI. However, the historian will realize that behind the impression of consensus in these essays lurks a reality which is both complex and subtle (and among unskilled authors often unwillingly so) and also infinitely varied. Therefore the tables and even my narrative illustration and explication of them should be regarded essentially as an aid to understanding, as a means of critically analyzing an extremely large and diverse body of manuscript material for which this study should serve only as introduction. However careful has been the attempt at objectivity in their drawing, both tables and narrative can only offer a flawed reflection of the human reality behind the Châlons essays, a reality rich in nuance and, because of the nature and origin of the essays and their authors, in misunderstanding as well.

essentiel des sociétés politiques.¹²⁷ If his work ceased, 'il faut qu'il aille chercher le travail ailleurs ou', Mirabeau added with an almost perceptible Gallic shrug, 'il périclisse de misère'.¹²⁸ For the most part the Châlons essayists appeared to have no acquaintance with the words or works of these writers, but having witnessed the increased suffering and discontent brought on by the Crown's experimentation with their economic philosophy of de-regulation and non-intervention at a time when the sheer number of hungry and jobless people was on the rise, they turn as with one voice to their sovereign to intervene on behalf of the people.¹²⁹

Indifference to the poor, to the plight of most of the labouring population, was unthinkable for those responding to the questions of the Châlons Academy, who had observed their hardships at first-hand. Their essays -- and, for many, their lives -- were an expression of their sympathy, their solidarity with the poor. These essayists were convinced that their society was polarizing into rich and poor and this vision had forced them to face the fact that the majority of Frenchmen was at least partially dependent upon the land owned or the employment offered by a wealthy minority who would, they asserted, henceforth require close supervision if the public good were to prevail over private interest. Though they might be all but ignorant of the political arithmetic of the physiocrats or the enlightened calculations of the philosophes, these writers had evolved an understanding of the effects of a rapidly increasing

¹²⁷ Mercier de la Rivière, Ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politique (1767), cited by Weulersse, Le Mouvement physiocratique en France de 1756 à 1770, II, 84.

¹²⁸ Mirbeau, L'Ami des hommes, 5^e partie, III, 32 cited in Ibid.

¹²⁹ For further discussion of the social and economic vision of those Châlons essayists who were in conscious opposition to the economic philosophy and social programme of the physiocrats see my 'What Price Economic Prosperity? Public Attitudes to Physiocracy in the Reign of Louis XVI', British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies, 9 (1986), 183-96.

population and had come to believe that rising unemployment, and bread and land prices could no longer be regarded as passing problems requiring only sporadic and temporary solutions.

Aware and, in many cases, responsible for attending to the problems thrown up by persistent and increasing poverty and misery in their own towns and villages, these writers poured out their thoughts in essays that ranged from cogent rational argument to episodic and polemical diatribe but all of which nevertheless conveyed their deep conviction that the Crown had to intervene on behalf of his labouring people. Yet, whatever sympathy they showed for the people was not borne of sentimentality. It was, one of them wrote in his essay for the 1782 competition, 'le Peuple qui par ses consommations et par ses travaux fournit à l'Etat le plus grande partie de ses revenus'.¹³⁰ The nation's economic welfare and social stability lay not, they maintained, with the propertied and privileged who seemingly controlled the land and its produce; it lay rather with the labouring people who were, in the persuasive phrases of another essayist, 'la portion la plus utile des citoyens, la plus nombreuse, celle de laquelle il est impossible de se passer', in short, 'les auteurs de nos véritables richesses'.¹³¹ Collectively the economic strength of the nation, these labouring poor were, these writers knew, nevertheless individually the subjects most vulnerable to poverty and exploitation. And so, these writers urged their sovereign to make the welfare of his labouring people his principal economic and social priority.

From the essays they wrote for the Châlons Academy on the plight of the begging and labouring poor there emerged a humanitarian economic vision which was directly opposed to the theories of the property/production-

¹³⁰ Bibliothèque Nationale fonds français 11420.

¹³¹ AD Marne I J 41 No. 78.

mind ed proponents of the emerging social and economic order. In their abstract economic equations and their elitist social vision these philosopher economists had under-valued what these essayists regarded as most precious, the human element.

Although the Châlons essayists consistently opposed large-scale production and favoured policies that would increase both jobs and the break-up and distribution of large properties, they did so because they believed that increasing the dependency and vulnerability of those who laboured would not create a more productive economy nor engender social harmony. They call upon their sovereign to introduce policies that would reflect his firm resolve to defend the people but which would, nevertheless, alter according to changing need. They call for the Crown to see that henceforth no Frenchman who wanted to work should lack the opportunity or the bread to feed his family. For only in promoting the welfare of the labouring classes could the Crown secure both the throne and the prosperity of the State. 'C'est en les protégeant, c'est en les secourant que [vous] les fait[es] prospérer et c'est dans cet état', concluded a lawyer essayist from Nancy, 'qu'ils font la richesse et la puissance du Souverain'.¹³² Through their essays to his royal academy at Châlons these writers hoped to counsel the Crown to ignore those who sought to disregard the people and their interests and assume a greater role than ever before in the economic direction of the nation.

It was perhaps merely living in what was called 'le siècle des lumières' that had persuaded these essayists to be optimistic about reform. But if so, the most likely source for their optimism was the Crown itself which since mid-century had enacted reforms that vacillated conspicuously between the interests of the social and economic elite and

¹³² AD Marne I J 41 No. 89, Aubert.

the obvious needs of the royal treasury and the people. The views the Châlons competitors addressed to their sovereign through his royal academy testified to their belief that Louis XVI had the interests of his people at heart and welcomed public support of necessary reforms that had heretofore met with powerful opposition from those whose privileged interests were endangered by government-led reform.

Witness to the vacillating policies brought about by the power struggles underlying the rise and fall of Turgot and Necker, the elimination of the guilds, the commutation of the corvée and the closing of the dépôts and then their reinstatement once powerful or propertied interests objected, the Châlons essayists, particularly the most politically astute among them, used their essays to appeal to Louis XVI. They asked him to recognize that 'des variations aussi promptes et aussi intéressantes pour le peuple sont quelquefois capables de l'inquiéter parce que', as one of the competitors reminded his academic judges, the economic circumstances of most of labouring people left them little time or inclination to wait for 'le bonheur des générations futures' since 'le peuple n'est jamais frappé que du présent'.¹³³ Thus, although those around him might try to persuade the Crown that the most prudent course was to adopt reforms 'par forme d'essay, précaution dont le motif est bien louable', a Paris lawyer and essayist conceded; it was, he warned 'pourtant bien dangereuse' because for the desperate poor 'c'est aujourd'hui ou jamais qu'on doit espérer la réussite'. The only hope that they had was that the Crown would finally recognize that it must 's'occuper des moyens de guérir la misère du peuple [et] coupe[r] au vif un mal déjà connu'.¹³⁴

¹³³ AD Marne I J 40 No. 70.

¹³⁴ Bibliothèque Municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne MS 866. This essayist added: 'Je sçais que le bonheur des peuples est le but où il aspire; je lui suppose les intentions les plus droites, les vues les plus

Tentative essays in reform that ignored poverty's economic and social causes and depended for success upon their acceptance by vested interests would never, these writers insisted, halt the abuses nor the distress and discontent of those struggling in crowded land and labour markets. As the Academy's questions had suggested, lasting reform that would ameliorate the lives of the labouring poor and enable the indigent to be useful to the state without making him unhappy would require, like the Crown's reforming ministers and intendants, the unswerving support of the Sovereign for 'quand le peuple devient excessivement pauvre, il faut un Roi pour le délivrer de l'oppression des riches et grandes'.¹³⁵

Powerless in their own lives to do much more than work or pray or compose essays to advance the cause of the people, these writers projected their vision of a regenerated France upon their sovereign -- the only figure they knew with sufficient power and authority to effect fundamental change in their society. In a letter to the Academy in 1777 about its published résumé of the essays on begging, an optimistic competitor wrote: 'Je suis bien persuadé qu'un jour le gouvernement éclairé par ces réflexions se déterminera à en adopter un ou plusieurs [...] et les fera exécuter au grand avantage du citoyen et de l'état'.¹³⁶ Thus, even though they might fear with the former soldier and minor municipal officer Couver that 'le mal est à son comble et [qu']il faut des remèdes violentes

pures et les plus sages, mais l'insatiable avidité de la plupart de ses subalternes titrés qui se plaisent à s'abreuver des larmes du peuple ne met-elle pas souvent des obstacles au bonheur qu'un Roy bienfaisant voudroit procurer à ses sujets'. Then, in obvious reference to the succession of fallen reformist ministers, he added: 'Un pilote expérimenté sait choisir des matelots habiles'.

¹³⁵ Gosselin, Réflexions d'un Citoyen, p. 43.

¹³⁶ AD Marne I J 42. Letter sent from Mayenne, dated 10 July 1777, from the noble Gabriel Pierre Tripiet de Loze. The Tripiet de Loze family took part in the assemblies of the Maine nobility in 1789.

et promptes pour le détourner', their essays were an affirmation of their faith that Louis XVI could avert with prompt administrative measures the unrest they felt menaced French society. 'Le tems est favorable pour les administrer', Couvert continued, offering along with his fellow essayists a long list of reforms. 'Il ne faut que les composer et les mettre sous les yeux d'un monarque bienfaisant'.¹³⁷ Thus, although their assessment of the social and economic trends operating in their society was undeniably pessimistic, the very act of writing essays for a royal academy was a public statement of their continued faith in the possibility of reform under Louis XVI.

That the essayists had no understanding of the revolutionary political implications of their demand for reform of hereditary and venal social and fiscal privilege is not surprising since not even the most sophisticated critics and reformers of 1789 had grasped this truth. However, unlike the writers of the High Enlightenment and the authors and academicians of a generation earlier who had popularized reformist social principles while aspiring to integration within privileged society, the Châlons essayists were in the process of reconsidering social values which seemed to ignore emerging economic realities. Many of them explicitly rejected the elite values of the old aristocratic social order and of the emerging -- and merging -- order of notables with their common defence of the sanctity of property and private interest over the public good, their reverence for privileged ease over productive labour, and their hostility to all but a limited or non-interventionist state. The structural reforms advocated by more than nine-tenths of the Châlons essayists -- whether they dealt with reforms in the tax structure, in the use or distribution of public and private property, or in publicly funded national

¹³⁷ AD Marne I J 38 No. 17.

programmes of agricultural employment or manufacturing -- were often advanced in conjunction with a call for the Crown to recognize a revolution in social values that would ultimately bring a radical change in the essential character of French society.

By their essays these writers offer eloquent testimony that long before the spring and summer of 1789 the France outside the salons was growing uneasy about the economic situation -- and the potential social and political consequences -- of a majority poor populace whose needs and rights polite society seemed intent on ignoring. To these, 'les Princes, les grands, les puissants et les riches', an unidentified essayist writing in 1776 addressed a clear warning to 'laisser approcher d'eux librement une vérité certaine' --

que malgré toutes les apparences, ils ont plus besoin des peuples que les peuples n'ont besoin d'eux; que quelle que soit l'assistance qu'ils s'empressent de donner aux peuples, celles qu'ils reçoivent des peuples est encore plus efficace que celle qu'ils leur donnent

and, finally, as if in special warning to enlightened believers in 'bonheur' --

pour tout dire en un mot, que les peuples peuvent être heureux sans eux mais qu'eux ne peuvent être heureux sans les peuples.¹³⁸

As we shall see, as we very briefly consider the essays written for the other competitions held by the Châlons Academy, there were others among the Frenchmen responding to the competitions of this academy who were beginning to enunciate a rejection of the caste values of Old Regime society. Many of these essayists, more highly skilled as lawyers or administrators, shared with the nucleus of reform-minded members of the Châlons Academy itself a growing awareness that polite society and its prosperous aspirants were attempting to graft the old values onto a society of notables who were

¹³⁸ AD Marne I J 38 No. 9.

presiding over what was becoming essentially a class society divided by social, economic, fiscal and juridical interest. By the questions it asked of the public and the terms in which it posed these questions, the Châlons Academy succeeded in attracting essays from a public which shared its perception of the nation as dividing ever more dangerously into rich and poor, privileged and unprivileged people. That the questions which evoked these views were posed by a royal academy is a measure of the reformist if not revolutionary spirit which was gaining legitimacy in the last decade of the Old Regime.

PART FOUR

A RADICAL PROGRAMME OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REFORM

VI

REFORMIST OPTIMISM

The Academy's competitions on the begging and labouring poor were, numerically, its most successful public essay competitions. The problems caused and suffered by the men and women who were the subject of these contests were so familiar that they prompted Frenchmen who might never have considered competing in the essay contests of another academy to set out in writing what they believed were the explanations for and possible solutions to the social and economic problems of the nation's indigent and working population. The Academy's questions seemed to require no professional expertise, for the problems they posed fell within the knowledge and experience of most ordinary people in the country. In addition, although both questions began from the assumption that reforms were necessary, they were open-ended and, apart from indicating that the Academy considered the plight of the nation's indigent and labouring poor worthy of attention and amelioration, these questions presented potential competitors with the opportunity to range freely over a host of issues not necessarily implied in the Academy's announcements. So, in addition to being the Academy's most popular contests, the competitions on the begging and labouring poor also generated essays which, of all the manuscripts submitted to this Academy, offer the most comprehensive overview of the opinions, the concerns, the grievances and the reformist optimism of a wide variety of well-meaning, literate Frenchmen who simply believed that their personal experience and insights might be of use to those, like the Châlons academicians, who were aware of the magnitude and misery of France's

labouring poor and committed to reforms that would reduce the burdens on them. Through the good offices of the reformist academicians in Châlons, the competitors in these contests seemed to hope that their views might reach the ear of those with the power and influence to introduce and sustain reform. And so, as we have seen, these essayists used their Châlons memoirs to air their views on any and all matters related to the generation or resolution of economic hardship in France and to the institutional and social structures which appeared to many of them to be condemning a majority in the nation to conditions of irreversible poverty.

The scrambled 'essays' and letters these competitors submitted for the Academy's judgement demonstrated graphically just what unpracticed writers and theoreticians they were. The quantitative analysis of their ideas and of their place in the social, economic and occupational hierarchy of the Old Regime which was set out in the previous two chapters was undertaken as a means of comprehending the diverse nature of both the material being considered and those who had produced it. Because their backgrounds ranged across many levels of the literate population and because of the dis-jointed and unsystematic manner in which a large number of these competitors argued and presented their various cases for reform (as well as because of the fragmentary nature of some of the essays themselves), systematic content analysis offered the most objective means of assessing and summarizing the opinions embedded in these texts. Establishing an overview of essays so diverse and reflecting the profound convictions of writers who had in many instances never before attempted to set forth their vision of France's present and hoped-for political economy required of the Academy (as it requires of their modern readers) a careful weighing up and piecing together of personal grievances, class resentments and prejudices, regional and professional differences, and reliance on

sources which ranged from the intensely personal to, in a tiny minority of cases, some of the philosophic texts which crowned their century 'le siècle des Lumières'.

The essays they wrote for these two contests are thus of inestimable value to the historian. Now as in the eighteenth century they permit their readers both to assess public perceptions of the scale and scope of poverty in the reign of Louis XVI and to take the political pulse of that portion of society which, despite its literacy and experience, did not otherwise enjoy the right to free public expression and thus to influence directly those with the power to introduce reforms. The Châlons Academy provided these Frenchmen with a focus and a forum in which they could address some of the most serious issues confronting ministers and officials in the decades prior to the Revolution. The essays they wrote in response thus provide a significant indication of public awareness not only of the economic hardship of millions within the country but of the social, economic, fiscal and administrative problems arising from a majority poor populace. They provide some indication, too, of the support there was in the larger populace, early in Louis XVI's reign, for greater state and secular responsibility for the welfare of France's poorest citizens.

The essays written for these contests were at the heart of the Châlons academicians continuing concern for France's malheureux. Attention to the welfare of those living and working to fuel a society whose benefits and bounty were rarely theirs to enjoy was an issue fundamental to the preoccupations of the academicians in Châlons. With these malheureux -- as much as with the powerful -- lay, they believed, the future of France and of her king. To ignore the needs of the majority in the nation who laboured for its benefit and their legitimate claim upon the rest of society was, in the view of those in Châlons's learned society -- as in the

view of many of their competitors -- to court economic and, ultimately, social and political disorder. It was this conviction that informed the Academy's competitions on the begging and labouring poor and it also informed the whole programme of reformist essay competitions which the Châlons society announced in the first two years of its existence as a royal body; and it was this conviction, too, which prompted this academy to facilitate public discussion of the problems engendered by the declining prospects of ordinary Frenchmen and which inspired its drive to get the needs of the people and the views of informed Frenchmen into the hands of those in government and on its fringes who had the power to influence reform. As we shall see, it also lay behind the Châlons Academy's efforts to get its résumés into the hands of an informed public who by their exercise of professional and administrative responsibilities at the local level had emerged as a new source of information, influence and support for a monarchy which the Châlons academicians believed had embarked with determination along the path of reform.

During the same period that the Châlons Academy was posing and judging its highly successful contest essays on the begging and labouring poor, it was also addressing itself to a less generalist public with questions inspired and funded by ministers and officials and those outside government circles actively involved in the promotion of fiscal, administrative and legal reform. Although the Châlons academicians were influenced in posing these questions by the reforming Intendant who presided over their province, by reformist ministers in government, and by enlightened benefactors who provided the money to fund the prizes offered for these contests, the academicians who were active in the work of the learned society at Châlons seem themselves early to have sensed that public opinion could have a significant role to play in providing sympathetic

ministers and officials with the practical advice and the political influence to meet privileged opposition to reforms which would reduce the institutionalized social, economic and legal injustices making Frenchmen poor and threatening the Crown with bankruptcy.

Between 1778 and 1782, that is in the period bridged by the Academy's contests on the begging and labouring poor, the men in Châlons announced competitions which treated the reform of the corvée, reforms in France's fiscal and administrative structures and of her laws and legal institutions and which solicited, too, the literate public's views on the provision of education for the popular classes. These contests attracted a more sophisticated competing public whose essays, considered as a whole, reflected more specialized knowledge of the reform issues they were advancing. Many of their authors were by training and experience extremely knowledgeable about the topics they were addressing for the Châlons Academy and, nearly a decade later, a number of them would emerge in the Revolution as spokesmen championing the very reforms they had advocated in their Châlons essays. From among those writing for the Academy would come, too, national political leaders who would influence some of the most significant reforms essayed during the early years of the Revolution.

The essays generated by these competitions, essays and treatises which can only be considered briefly here, were to have a profound effect on the life of the Châlons Academy long before their authors or their vision were to make their mark upon revolutionary events. Although the Châlons academicians posed these reformist questions confident that enlightened ministers and public figures were eager to receive the opinions and support of well-meaning members of the literate public, their questions were in fact announced during a period when the monarchy was being besieged by both reformist and reactionary ministers and by both enlightened and

benighted privilégiés whose vacillating attention to the welfare of the nation and their own positions in the regime made it a dangerous time for those, whether naïve provincial academicians or their optimistic literate public, to express the 'public opinion' to which all these elements had purportedly turned their attention. Thus, while the essays and essay competitors we will now consider provide another example of the nature and extent of the optimism of would-be reformers who, without other political voice in the early years of Louis XVI's reign, wrote for the Châlons Academy's contests, their essays and the government's response to them also signalled the beginning of the end of the Châlons Academy's public influence as a learned society until it, and the ideas it had championed, emerged -- along with the Frenchmen who had written for them -- to express once again reformist opinions which would contribute to the shaping of revolutionary events and institutions in their nation.

In the two chapters which follow we will briefly consider the public success, the public failures and the private machinations of the Châlons society and its essay competitors in the years that spanned the Academy's approved and dis-approved essay contests and the early years of Revolution. Chapter VI will consider, first, the public's and the government's response to the Academy's initial competition and the optimism about reform that this engendered in the Châlons academicians and among proponents of reform in government and the wider public; it will also examine the openly reformist questions that the Academy asked in the wake of the success of its first contest. Chapter VII will survey the government's attempts first to censor and then silence the Châlons Academy and its essay public and the response of both academicians and essayists to ministerial interference and repression. Finally, it will briefly treat the fate of the Châlons Academy and the ideas and the essayists for whom the public prize competitions of

this learned society had provided a first -- or at least -- a formative occasion in which to declare publicly their attitude towards the people and towards the privileged, their regime and its prospects in the reign of Louis XVI.

EVIDENCE FOR OPTIMISM

The Academy's optimism about the role that it and its contests were to play in the movement toward reform seems to have been unbounded during the years which immediately followed its first competition and its announcement of the series of reformist essay questions it proposed for public discussion during Necker's first ministry. This optimism was based on the response of the public, of ministers and princes, publicists and philanthropists to its first contest and published résumé and to the reception accorded the announcement of its subsequent essay topics. And it created in this fledgling provincial learned society a confidence in the Crown and the power and authority of its reformist ministers and of the role of public opinion which, in the short term at least, was to prove unfounded. However, read not backwards from the revolution and pre-revolution but forwards from the coronation of Louis XVI and the Academy's extremely successful first essay competition, the evidence available to support the Academy's optimism was convincing and so will be reconstructed here from the perspective of the men in Châlons who from 1777 onward worked to advance these essays in reform.

The public's response to the Academy's first essay competition had exceeded even the most optimistic expectations of the Châlons academicians. As one of its members was to comment later, 'il faut le dire à la gloire de l'humanité: jamais on ne vit paroître, sur aucune arène littéraire, un si grand nombre de rivaux; il semble qu'aucun peuple n'a voulu rester

indifférent dans la grande cause des malheureux'.¹ Competitors had been invited to submit their essays for a deadline of May 1777 but even before the Academy was able to announce its prize winners, word had begun to spread that it had received an extraordinarily large response to its competition announcement.

That summer Condorcet, acting in his capacity as permanent secretary of the Académie Française, wrote to his counterpart in Châlons offering to advise him on the procedure followed in the Paris Academy for the selection of its contest topics and their prize winners. Sabbathier returned the compliment by confirming that the Châlons society would seek to model itself on the Paris academies and almost by return of post Condorcet replied that he was more than willing to be of service should the Academy desire it. He wrote again in early August congratulating the society on the success of its first contest question: 'Je suis charmé que vous ayez reçu de bonnes pièces sur la question importante que vous avez proposée'. Condorcet also urged Sabbathier to maintain close links with the Paris academy and suggested that cooperation could be of mutual utility. 'Vous me trouverez toujours disposé, Monsieur, à vous procurer tous les éclaircissemens que vous pouvez désirer. Une correspondance entre les secrétaires des académies,' he wrote flatteringly, 'ne pourroit qu'être très utile aux progrès de la raison, en répandant plus vite ce qui dans chaque genre mérite d'être connu'.² Comments like these undoubtedly served to bolster the new Academy's already soaring confidence.

¹ AD Marne C 1768 - Discours prononcé à l'ouverture de la séance publique de l'Académie [...] le 25 août mil sept cent quatre vingt dix par M. L'Abbé de Lacourt.

² AD Marne I J 195 - letter from Condorcet to Sabbathier dated 8 August 1777.

At its public meeting of 25 August the Academy announced the name of the winner of its first contest prize along with a list of sixteen other essays which had also merited the Academy's special approbation. In the printed notice of its proceedings that day, which it dispatched to its protectors and to Bertin and Necker, the Academy also declared its intention to publish a detailed résumé of the contest essays. Among the first to respond to this announcement was Bertin, the minister who along with Miromesnil had co-signed the Academy's letters patent. On 16 September Bertin wrote the Academy in the following glowing terms:

Vous ne pouviez pas proposer un sujet plus intéressant que les moyens de détruire la mendicité. Mais ce qui rendra encore plus utiles les vues de l'Académie, c'est l'intention où vous êtes de réunir dans un corps d'ouvrages les idées les plus saines et les plus susceptibles d'exécution répandues dans les différens discours qui vous ont été adressés; comme un pareil ouvrage ne peut avoir trop de publicité, vous vous proposez sans doute de le faire imprimer et dans ce cas j'espère que vous voudrez bien m'en envoyer un exemplaire.³

Endorsing both their competition and their projected publication, Bertin inquired if the Academy had received any essays which were 'particulièrement occupé[s] des moyens propres à prévenir la mendicité plutôt qu'à la soulager' and then asked if he might possibly have an advance copy of any such essays along with the essay numbered 85, a comment that would seem to indicate that Bertin was privy to an insider's information about the contest's competitors.⁴

³ AD Marne I J 195 - Bertin, whose letter to the Academy is dated 28 August 1777, was also an honorary member of the society.

⁴ Ibid. Bertin's information may have come through his former premier commis La Barberie who had been among the first associate members named in the Academy's letters patent in August of 1775; it also could have come from the essayist himself, a M. Duperron, who had sent the minister a card of silk samples for a projected works project which was to employ poor people in the production of silk cloth. The sample he sent to Châlons, and which he asked it to forward to Necker, can still be seen among the Academy's dossiers of contest essays for this year. AD Marne I J 208 - letters of 16 July and 5 October 1777. By 1790 Duperron had established in Versailles a workshop employing 168 people under government auspices which

Within days the Academy also received letters from Necker, who asked it to send him a copy of the winning essay, and from d'Orfeuil who congratulated it once again on its work and assured the Academy of his 'vif intérêt' in their projected publication and his willingness to be of assistance.⁵ These letters were soon followed by another prized communication, this time from the Academy's Crown-appointed protector, the Duc de Bourbon, who wrote to praise the Academy not only for its current success but also for the competition questions it had announced for its contests for the next two years:

Je ne puis qu'approuver les discours qui ont concouru cette année pour le prix; le grand nombre de concurrents qui se sont disputé le prix est pour vous une preuve bien satisfaisante de la bonté du sujet qu'avoit choisi l'académie. Je ne puis qu'approuver de même les sujets des prix que vous proposez pour les années 1778 et 1779 et qui tendent de même à l'utilité publique.⁶

Word of the Academy's success had by this time also appeared in the press. On 22 September the Journal de Paris carried an item about the extraordinary public interest which the Academy's competition had aroused and mentioned that the Academy had been able to select its winners from a field of 116 entries.⁷

In late November the Academy received the first of many recorded letters of inquiry from philanthropic bodies interested in acquiring copies of the winning essays. The writer of this first letter, which was sent in the name of the Société du Bien public, indicated that the society was

was described as a 'Fabrique royale de soie vraie galette filée par les pauvres'. See Tuetey, L'Assistance publique à Paris pendant la Révolution, II, no. 110.

⁵ AD Marne I J 195 - the letters from Necker and d'Orfeuil are both dated 17 September 1777. Necker had been made an honorary member 31 July.

⁶ AD Marne I J 195 - letter dated 1 November 1777. The two new questions were on the reform of the corvée (first posed for 1778) and of popular education (first posed for 1779).

⁷ Journal de Paris, No. 265 (22 September 1777).

being formed under government auspices in Paris and that its members were most anxious to benefit from the Academy's help. The Academy's response to this inquiry allows us to glimpse the seriousness with which the Châlons academicians regarded the task before them in summarizing the views of the public who had responded to their contest question on begging and also the role that the Academy had begun to see itself playing in the practical working out of its ideal of ameliorating conditions for the poor. On 3 December the Academy wrote to the Société du Bien public de Paris suggesting that

il seroit peut être à propos que les personnes illustres et bienfaisantes qui ont formé le projet d'une société aussi intéressante pour le bien de l'humanité, avant de rendre leur projet public, voulussent bien prendre connoissance des vues qui se trouveront renfermées dans l'ouvrage dont l'académie est actuellement occupée, et qui sera comme le résultat des 116 mémoires qui lui ont été envoyés [...].⁸

The Academy's determination to publish its résumé as quickly as possible was reinforced a fortnight later by an announcement made in its assembly by the abbé de Beauvais, Bishop of Senez, who as an honorary member of the Academy and a close friend of the Bishop of Châlons Leclerc de Juigné, was not an infrequent participant in the Academy's meetings. Of roturier origin, de Beauvais had on occasion used his position to speak out in sympathy for France's 'pauvres malheureux' and against those who sought to mask their suffering from the eyes of their sovereign.⁹ He

⁸ The Academy's letter is transcribed in AD Marne I J 195.

⁹ According to a nineteenth century source, the outspoken abbé preached one of the last sermons Louis XV ever heard. In it Beauvais warned his sovereign: 'Sire, mon devoir de ministre d'un Dieu de vérité m'ordonne de vous dire que vos peuples sont malheureux, que vous en êtes la cause, et qu'on vous le laisse ignorer'. His text was taken from the book of Jonah: 'Dans quarante jours Ninive sera détruite ...'. Forty days later Louis XV died.

Beauvais had himself suffered at the hands of the favourites at Versailles. When Louis XV proposed to appoint him Bishop of Senez in 1773, they opposed his appointment, complaining of his roturier origins (his father was a lawyer in the Paris Parlement). Beauvais's reply, which

seems to have taken particular interest in the Academy's first essay competition and with its bishop and protector to have shared high regard for the Academy's expressed intention to devote itself to work for the public good. He used the occasion of his December visit to announce to the Academy that he had been

chargé d'une manière spéciale par M. d'Argouges conseiller d'Etat et l'un des principaux membres de la commission établie par le Roi pour examiner les moyens d'améliorer les hôpitaux de la ville, de représenter à l'Académie que cette commission désireroit que la Compagnie lui communiquât ses observations au sujet des mendiants, et notamment les mémoires qui lui ont été adressés à ce sujet.¹⁰

Beauvais's announcement and the news he brought from Paris succeeded in persuading the Châlons academicians that the collection of informed opinion brought together in their essay contests could be of crucial importance to those in government seeking to implement reforms designed to alleviate popular suffering. On 17 August 1777, only a week before the Academy had announced its prize winners, Louis XVI had appointed a special commission to advise the Crown on 'les moyens dictés par l'humanité d'adoucir le sort des indigents' with special attention to be given to hospital reform, beginning in Paris but eventually to extend to the whole realm, and to the welfare of foundlings. Leading figures in the government, the Church and magistracy including Necker, the archbishop of Paris, the first presidents and procureur général of the Paris Parlement and the Chambre des Comptes

circulated at court, was defiant: 'Si je croyais que la noblesse fût la principale condition requise pour l'épiscopat, je foulerais ma croix aux pieds et je renoncerais à la haute dignité dont je suis revêtu.' Beauvais, who was a deputy to the Estates General, died in April of 1790, and in its eulogy the Châlons Academy's then director the abbé de Lacourt noted that the bishop, 'enflammé de l'amour des peuples' had been labelled by their enemies as a 'prêtre dangereux'. See AD Marne 1768 - Discours prononcé par M. L'Abbé de Lacourt 25 Août 1790 for further details of the prelate's relationship to the Academy. See too, Michaud, Biographie universelle, III, 127-28 and Didot, Nouvelle biographie, V, 51-52.

¹⁰ AD Marne I J 195 - deliberations of 17 December 1777. De Beauvais was also present at the Academy's next meeting on 7 January 1778 - AD Marne I J 208.

and the lieutenant général of police Lenoir had been appointed to this commission and it was Miromesnil who presided over its first meeting.¹¹ Access to this body through the résumé of their contest essays would enable the Academy to be a channel of opinion and information which would give it and the larger public a new and contributory role in the deliberations of a commission whose reforming work on behalf of the poor could have national reverberations.

The cumulative effect of Beauvais's intervention, the request for help from the Paris philanthropic society, the offer of help from Condorcet, and the encouragement the Academy had received from Bertin, Necker, d'Orfeuil and the duc de Bourbon galvanized its members into concerted action. The abbé Malvaux rose to express the urgency and the seriousness of the challenge before the Academy. As the minutes of its meeting for 17 December note:

M. le Directeur a observé que l'Académie étoit aujourd'huy assemblée pour l'objet le plus important qui puisse intéresser des esprits éclairés et des âmes honnêtes, que les ministres sollicitent les lumières de la compagnie, que les personnes de la plus haute considération se sont jointes à eux pour implorer également son secours; enfin la ville, les Provinces, la capitale même attendent pour ainsi dire en suspens l'ouvrage qu'elle a annoncé au Gouvernement et au public, et qui doit fixer les destinées des malheureux, que dans ces circonstances l'académie devroit signaler son zèle, en se hâtant de répondre aux vœux empressés de la nation.

On Malvaux's suggestion the members of the Academy agreed that each of them should share in the task of reading and extracting passages for the résumé 'afin de hâter le travail le plus qu'il seroit possible'; Malvaux agreed to act as general editor of the collection.¹²

Despite the fact that the Academy had already begun to receive essays for its next competition on reform of the corvée, members obviously devoted

¹¹ For further information on the work of this commission see Bloch, L'Assistance et l'état, pp. 226-35.

¹² AD Marne J 195 - deliberations for 17 December 1777.

much of their energies throughout the winter and early spring of 1778 to producing the extracts which Malvaux required because in April he was able to report that the résumé of the essays on the destruction of begging was 'fort avancé' and to move that the Academy appoint a committee to 'examiner en dernier lieu ce résumé'. Following the requirement laid down in the Academy's Crown-imposed 'Statuts et règlements', this committee met and authorized publication, under the Academy's auspices, of Malvaux's summary. The work had been completed in only nine months.¹³

The next hurdle was to find enough money to pay for publication of the résumé which was to be a bound book of over five hundred pages. Much of the money which had come from the government's grant had been absorbed by the initial costs of providing their meeting room with furniture and paying for candles and heat and so once more the Academy turned to d'Orfeuil. The Academy's letters to him illustrate their dependence on his good will. 'Monsieur, votre académie (Nous pouvons à bien juste titre la nommer ainsi puisqu'elle vous doit son existence)' began the first, 'il est trop manifeste, Monsieur, que c'est encore à votre protection que nous sommes redevables'.¹⁴ And in early September, after several of the academicians had signed a promissory note for part of the sum they needed for the printer, they wrote him again:

C'est vous, Monsieur, que par vos sentimens et vos exemples lui avez inspirez l'amour du bien public et c'est en suivant la voye que vous

¹³ By Statute XXII of its rules the Academy had to appoint at least two examiners to assess any work published under its auspices. Because of the importance it attached to this first major work, the Academy elected four of its number to the committee and coopted Malvaux onto it. In a tribute to Malvaux a subsequent director of the Academy noted of the résumé 'cet ouvrage demandoit un travail immense: M. L'abbé Malvaux n'y voit que le bonheur d'être utile; il s'en charge; & cette grande entreprise est terminée dans l'espace de neuf mois'. AD Marne C 1768.

¹⁴ AD Marne C 1768 - letter to the Intendant signed by the Academy's three officers Malvaux, Navier and Sabbathier and dated 23 August.

lui avez tracé qu'elle cherchera toujours à vous plaire et à vous marquer la vive reconnaissance dont elle est pénétrée pour vos bienfaits.¹⁵

Within the month the Intendant had agreed to supplement their funds and pay the rest of the printer's costs: 'Je prends volontiers sur moi de subvenir à la dépense de 400 exemplaires de cet ouvrage, bien entendu que le prix n'excédera pas 600 livres au plus, et présumant que le conseil du Roi ne désapprouvera pas cette dépense'.¹⁶

By January of 1779 the Academy had begun receiving fairly insistent letters from honorary and associate members in Paris and also journalists inquiring exactly when its collection of winning essays would be available to the public. 'Le livre sur la mendicité paroitra-t-il bientôt?' queried one. 'On m'en parle tous les jours et je ne sais plus que dire.'¹⁷ The mathematician Paté, who as an associate member of the society (and a former colleague of Sabbathier at the collège) had been invited to help with the distribution of the book, wrote to Sabbathier in February to ask when he and the other Parisian members of the Academy who were to perform this task could expect to receive copies of the book. In this letter Paté mentioned that another associate member of the society, Necker's premier commis at the finance ministry Dailly, seemed anxious to receive a copy; and then, somewhat cryptically, he closed his letter, urging the Academy to speed

¹⁵ AD Marne I J 195 - letter to d'Orfeuil of 12 September 1778.

¹⁶ AD Marne I J 195 - letter dated 30 September 1778.

¹⁷ AD Marne I J 208 - the Academy's dossiers contain letters from journalists like La Blancherie, who signed himself 'agent général de la correspondance pour les sciences et les arts', from those who had submitted essays for the competition like Miger and Lottin, and associate members like d'Origny, a conseiller to the Cour des monnaies, and the royal censor Le Chevalier.

publication and sounding a warning note: 'Hatez, le periculum est in morâ'.¹⁸

With funds scarce and only five hundred copies in this first edition of its résumé the Academy carefully compiled a list of those in Paris with sufficient authority to make good use of their book. A letter to Malvaux from the royal censor Le Chevalier,¹⁹ an associate member of the Academy, illustrates the planning and work that went into the presentation of what eventually numbered more than fifty complimentary copies of the book which the Academy had set aside for this purpose.

Paris le 15 avril 1779

Je n'ai rien négligé, mon cher Abbé, pour m'acquitter de concert avec M^r Paté de la commission dont l'Académie nous a fait l'honneur de nous charger. [...] Enfin les exemplaires au nombre de 30, nous ont été remis Dimanche dernier, et les jours suivans nous en avons fait la distribution. L'ouvrage a été présenté à M. l'Archevêque de Paris, aux premiers magistrats administrateurs des hospitaux, à M^{rs} de la commission du conseil pour la réforme des hospitaux, à M^r le Prévot des Marchands, à M^r le Lieutenant Général de Police, à M^r le Directeur général de la Librairie, à M^{me} Necker, à quelques uns des curés de Paris &c. Nous aurions désiré pouvoir étendre plus loin la distribution; mais les exemplaires nous ont manqué. Dans les maisons ou nous n'avons trouvé personne, nous avons laissé un billet, portant que MM ... députés de l'Académie de Châlons sont venus pour avoir l'honneur de présenter &c.

¹⁸ AD Marne I J 208. Although Paté, who had been made an associate member of the Academy in August of 1778, had recently moved to Paris, he continued to maintain close links with the Academy, reading its assembly his 'Mémoire sur l'utilité d'un cours de mathématiques pratiques dont les leçons se donneront les dimanches et fêtes non solennels aux ouvriers et aux artistes de la ville de Châlons [...] avec un projet d'émulation' in September of 1779. Paté's hope was that his course could be incorporated into the curriculum of the École de dessin which Rouillé d'Orfeuil had recently established in Châlons to teach workers and artisans the rudiments of design on Sundays and holidays.

¹⁹ Le Chevalier, who is listed as censor for works of belles-lettres and history in the Almanach royal for the year 1777, was, like Malvaux, a cleric and, like Sabbathier, author of an extremely popular elementary textbook. His Prosodie ou méthode courte et facile pour apprendre les premiers éléments de la quantité et la poésie latine was first published in 1760 and reprinted year after year by the Châlons Academy's Paris bookseller Delalain throughout its author's lifetime and even after, the last edition appearing in 1830, twenty-three years after the abbé's death. See L'Almanach royal, l'année 1777 (Paris, Le Breton, 1777), p. 453 and Quérard, La France littéraire.

The initial response to the book had been more than encouraging, he reported. Among those he knew personally -- and here we see the Academy's adroit use of the existing network of relationships to which men like Le Chevalier were privy²⁰ -- the royal censor mentioned that

M^{rs} les premiers présidents de Nicolay, M^s de la Michodière, C^{er} d'état, M^r le President de Rôray, M^{rs} Du Metz et Du Four de Villeneuve, M^{tres} des Requêtes et M. le Curé de S^t Paul m'ont chargé de faire parvenir leurs remerciemens à l'académie, applaudissant beaucoup au zèle et aux vues de la compagnie. Je ne doute pas que les autres personnes, que nous n'avons point trouvées, n'aient partagé les mêmes sentimens: Je ne cite que celles-ci parce qu'ayant l'honneur de les connoître, j'ai eu l'occasion de les voir en particulier.

Le Chevalier adds that he has presented his last remaining copy of the résumé to Chaumont de La Millière. As 'chef du service des hôpitaux au contrôle général' and 'rapporteur de la commission du Conseil pour les hôpitaux' La Millière was a key figure in the work of the commission whose request for copies of the competition essays had done so much to inspire the book's completion. His approbation marked a further advance in the

²⁰ In the list of associate members of the Academy we find the names of three other royal censors: Pajon de Moncets, who was a close friend of Navier and a doctor in the Paris medical faculty as well as being an associate of the Orleans Agricultural Society; Missa, who was also 'docteur régent de la Faculté de Médecine de Paris'; and Joseph Raulin, a much-published medical scientist, who belonged to several academies, including the Royal Society of London and the Arcades de Rome, and whose successful career as a doctor in the provinces led to a move to Paris and his being named 'médecin ordinaire du roi'. The Academy, again through Paté, used its contact with Pajon de Moncets when it published the essays it received in 1780 on the reform of penal laws. AD Marne I J 209 - letter of 2 March 1783.

See Quérard, La France littéraire, VII, p. 463 for a list of Raulin's numerous publications, which included several on the illnesses of women and children, which were published under ministerial auspices, and another on soil improvement, particular interests of several members of the Châlons Société littéraire and Académie. It is likely that Navier provided the link between the Châlons society and all these medical practitioner/censors, all of whose names appear in the list of censors in the category 'Histoire naturelle, médecine' in the Almanach royal for 1777, p. 452.

Academy's growing reputation among the influential. 'C'est un homme d'esprit et qui entend la matière', Le Chevalier reported.

Il m'a dit qu'il attendoit cet ouvrage avec empressement. Il l'a reçu de la manière la plus honnête et m'a chargé d'assurer l'Académie de toute sa reconnaissance. Je sais d'ailleurs que tous les membres de la commission ont été très sensibles à la réception de l'ouvrage'.²¹

If the Academy were able to supply its Paris deputies additional copies of its publication, they would, Le Chevalier assures Malvaux, easily be able to place them with many other influential figures who had already expressed interest in the work.

J'aurois désiré pouvoir offrir encore des Exemplaires à plusieurs Magistrats et savants de ma connoissance qui m'en avoient demandé. Mais le nombre des Exemplaires n'étant pas suffisant, je me suis borné aux Magistrats du premier rang et aux personnes qui avoient des titres particuliers pour obtenir la préférence. M^r Paté m'a fait espérer encore quelques nouveaux exemplaires: s'il peut les avoir et me les fournir, j'en ferai aussitôt la distribution.

Le Chevalier concludes his letter with the suggestion that the Academy consider distributing copies of its work to the press and, again, offers to act as its intermediary.

²¹ AD Marne I J 208. Chaumont de La Millière was intendant des finances and had been put in charge of hospitals by Necker. Loménie de Brienne placed the general management of the dépôts under his direction in 1787, in charge of the department of mendicity. He was given a skeleton staff, following cost-cutting measures, and put in charge of a streamlining and economising of administration of the depots. He would eventually become an active member of the Comité de Mendicité. For an excellent summary of the report he prepared of the findings of the hospital commission of 1778 see Christian Cheminade, 'Regards sur l'assistance hospitalière en 1778: Le rapport du maître des requêtes Chaumont de La Millière', Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 311 (1993), 201-17.

Among those Le Chevalier mentions in his letter was another figure destined to play a key role in Necker's charitable and fiscal reforms. The conseiller d'Etat Dufour de Villeneuve was appointed to yet another Necker-inspired commission created to prepare a draft of the contract to be established between Crown and those hospitals which by the edict of January 1780 were authorized to sell their property to liquidate their debts. This edict, which would be invoked by the Constituant Assembly as a precedent for the nationalization of hospital property, marked a new phase in the monarchy's appropriation of the administration and property of charitable foundations because it provided that the surplus remaining after hospital debts were paid was to be incorporated in the Caisse des Domaines. Bloch, L'Assistance, pp. 304-15.

Avez vous songé, mon cher Abbé, à faire l'envoi de l'ouvrage aux journalistes? Je ne sais s'ils l'ont reçu; mais je sais qu'ils n'en ont pas encore parlé. Si la chose n'a pas été faite, il seroit encore temps et il seroit aisé de la réparer, en donnant la commission au libraire: je m'en chargerai volontiers aussi, mais dans ce cas il faudroit me faire passer 4 ou 5 exemplaires pour cet objet.

Le Chevalier then adds a comment which indicates the success that the Academy's publication was already rumoured to enjoy. 'Peut-être', he speculates, seeking an explanation for the Academy's seeming failure to get review copies to the press, 'attendés-vous la nouvelle edition, à laquelle on m'a dit que vous travaillés. Quoi qu'il en soit je crois devoir vous faire cette observation.'

A letter from Paté to the Academy's perpetual secretary reiterates the interest the book was arousing in Paris and the mathematician's zeal to distribute copies usefully and as soon as possible. 'Je vous prie, mon cher confrère', he writes Sabbathier, 'de représenter à l'Académie qu'il nous faut encore absolument 22 exemplaires pour compléter. Je vous supplie donc de m'envoyer le plutot possible un mandat pour le Libraire de La Lain'.²²

Such was the demand for the Academy's collection of competition essays on Les Moyens de détruire la mendicité en France, en rendant les Mendians utiles à l'Etat sans les rendre malheureux that Malvaux was, as Le Chevalier had heard, already at work on a second edition of the book. Within months of its publication the first edition had gone out of print

²² AD Marne I J 208. A note appended to Paté's letter, which is dated 13 April 1779, provides both a personal touch to this account of the Academy's activities in Paris and evidence that Sabbathier had himself been in the capital: 'J'ai fait chercher votre parapluie dans tout l'hôtel de Juigné. On ne l'a pas trouvé.' Although it is unclear whether the Academy's secretary had visited the private hotel there of the Châlons bishop or his brother the marquis de Juigné, former ambassador to Russia and honorary member of the society, we know that both these powerful contacts were active in promoting the interests of the Academy with those in authority.

and Malvaux was given the task of preparing a 'nouvelle édition, revue, corrigée & augmentée' by still more essays on the subject which had arrived since the Academy had awarded its prize.²³

Demand for information about the Academy's publication was such in this period that journalists and publicists resorted to any number of ploys to obtain copies of its résumé. Linguet got an acquaintance who had competed in the Academy's first contest to pressure Sabbathier to authorize the Academy's Paris bookseller to give him a copy of the book,²⁴ while an editor of the Journal de Littérature, des Sciences et des Arts promised to insert extracts and summaries of the contest essays in its pages.²⁵ The success of the Academy's first contest also aroused interest in its projected competitions and publications; a contributing editor of the Journal de physique wrote to Sabbathier asking him to provide the journal with regular information about both its members and its future essay competitions pledging himself to see that this useful information was given wide circulation if only Sabbathier would supply him with the copy.²⁶

²³ This second edition was published early in 1780 and, as the Academy's earliest historian notes, this edition, too, was soon exhausted so that within less than twelve months both editions of its résumé of its first public competition had had such success that they were completely out of print. Menu, La Société littéraire, p. 49. We know from a letter Malvaux wrote to Sabbathier on 3 March 1783 that work on a third edition of the begging essays was then well under way because the abbé indicates to Sabbathier that he had found funding in Paris to cover the cost of a new edition and that he hoped to bring the copy to Châlons in time for its public meeting in August. AD Marne I J 209.

²⁴ AD Marne I J 208 - letters of 27 March and 5 May 1779.

²⁵ AD Marne I J 209 - letter of 31 December 1780. The petitioner hoped to add support for his request by reminding Sabbathier that the journal gave the profits from its publication to an orphanage (for the children of military) whose patrons were Louis XVI and his queen. On the journal itself see Sgard, Dictionnaire des journaux, II, 602-03.

²⁶ AD Marne I J 209 - letter of 22 April 1782. On the journal see Sgard, *Ibid.*, II, 995-98.

As word of the Academy's résumé spread, demand for it and for the wisdom it contained drew the Châlons society into regular correspondence with a number of activists or administrators who were working under government direction in the provinces to establish model institutions to demonstrate, on a local level, what could be done to relieve the misery of those forced into destitution and to introduce administrative reforms to reduce the burdens and improve the prospects of those suffering under the present fiscal and economic regime. Drawing their optimism initially from the reform initiatives undertaken by the government through them, the members of these bodies writing to the Châlons Academy seem to have been further encouraged by its success in canvassing, publishing and circulating the views of an informed broader public expressing their support for these reforms and others essayed by the Crown in recent years. In the Academy's files are to be found copies of Montlinot's account of his administration of the model dépôt at Soissons²⁷ as well as correspondence from the inspector of apprenticed foundlings at the Paris Hôpital général Lambert who, himself a late competitor in the Academy's first contest, wrote in 1779 requesting that he be sent a copy of the résumé.²⁸ Included in its dossiers, too, is a treatise sent by Jean Colombier, the doctor whom Necker had appointed 'inspecteur général des hôpitaux civils et des maisons de force' after reading the reform project for the Paris Hôtel-Dieu which Colombier had submitted to the Director General's commission on hospital

²⁷ Bibliothèque municipale de Châlons-sur Marne MS 1280.

²⁸ AD Marne I J 208 - letter dated 26 March 1779. Although submitted too late to be considered for the prize or included in the first edition of the résumés, Lambert's opinions were cited in Malvaux's second edition of the essays, see pp. 48, 54, 129, 149, 220, 387 and 458.

reform in 1777.²⁹ The Academy's activities also attracted the attention of the abbé de l'Épée, who became a member of the society in May of 1778 just months before Necker provided him with the funding to establish a permanent home for his institute for the deaf and dumb.³⁰

The Academy also received praise -- and a steady stream of letters and queries -- from activists in two other institutions which had been established under the influence of the Director General. The duc de Béthune-Charost, a liberal noble and philanthropist and prominent member of the provincial assembly which Necker had established in Berry, regularly sought the Academy's advice or help in matters related to reform and public assistance (particularly reform of the corvée and the creation of work projects and employment schemes). In a cover letter he wrote to explain a reform initiative being essayed by the Berry assembly, Charost addressed the Châlons academicians as 'des citoyens éclairés qui se sont occupés de bannir la mendicité', men whom he regarded as worthy advisers who would not fail to 'donner leurs vues sur des objets faits pour intéresser le coeur de toutes les âmes sensibles'. Asking for the Academy's ideas on how to ensure fair wages for day labourers and on why stocking production appeared to be on the decline in rural areas, he remarked confidently that he knew he could rely on the members of the Châlons society for they had already

²⁹ See his letter to the Academy of 10 December 1786 - AD Marne I J 195. On receipt of his treatise the Academy immediately decided to put his name forward as an associate member of the society. For the best recent account of Colombier's career as a government inspector see Adams, Bureaucrats and Beggars, pp. 170-86 and 245-46.

³⁰ AD Marne I J 10 and I J 209. The funding came through an arrêt du Conseil of 21 November 1778. See Bloch, L'Assistance, p. 235, for an account of Necker's support for this work.

The administrators of the Bureau de charité of Chateauroux, established in 1778 under the special protection of Mme Necker who hoped it would serve as a model institution for other towns, systematically sent the Academy reports of their activities on behalf of the poor. In one of several such letters we find the following comments which provide some indication of the encouraging picture the Châlons academicians would have had of the influence their first public essay competition was exercising on the minds of public-spirited provincials who shared their concern for the plight of France's indigent. The terms in which the Chateauroux administrators couched their letter mirror those of the Academy's competition question and reflect both their reformist optimism and the influence these public servants believed that the Châlons Academy enjoyed with those in power. 'C'est avec la plus vive satisfaction que nous avons l'honneur de vous informer que les bureaux de charité se propagent de jour en jour dans notre province'; and then, after listing all the towns in which bureaux had been established, they crowned their letter with this prediction:

La province va jouir du plaisir consolant de nourrir et soulager les pauvres, abolir la mendicité et rendre les mendiants utiles à l'état sans les rendre malheureux, projet si sagement conçu par l'académie de Chaalons et qui sous un prince aussi bienfaisant pourroit avoir son exécution si tous les bureaux de charité réunis et appuyés de messieurs de l'académie mettoient sous les yeux du gouvernement, déjà instruit, l'avantage et l'utilité de semblables établissemens.³²

Even discounting the verbiage of eighteenth-century flattery -- flattery to which the Châlons academicians were not necessarily immune -- there is no doubting the optimism of these correspondents nor the faith they had that if good men worked together to encourage the Crown to take action for

³² AD Marne I J 209. For further information on the bureau at Chateauroux see Bloch, L'Assistance, pp. 222-24.

the benefit of his people, the terrible suffering of France's poor could be alleviated.

This endorsement of the Academy's influence in promoting the cause of France's malheureux before the powerful and the public seems to have been widely held and to date from the publication of its first résumé. The author of a book called Projets de bienfaisance et de patriotisme pour toutes les villes et gros bourgs du royaume et applicables dans toutes les villes de l'Europe explicitly linked public interest in the alleviation of popular misery to the publication of the Châlons Academy's first book.

Les mémoires qui ont concouru pour le prix accordé en 1777 par cette Académie naissante ont excité le zèle d'une nation naturellement bienfaisante. Une émulation générale s'est élevée de tous les côtés; plusieurs villes ont déjà proscrit la mendicité et ont employé les moyens les plus efficaces pour l'empêcher de se reproduire.³³

The public response to the Academy's contests was not without effect on the academic world's privileged bodies. We have already noted Condorcet's interest in the Châlons society following the success of its first contest; but he was not alone in his recognition of its ascendant public profile. Indeed, within three years of the publication of the Academy's second edition of its begging essays, Condorcet was to listen as an unnamed speaker in the Académie Française dared suggest that that august body might take the Châlons Academy and its successful public essay contests as a model for its own essay competitions.³⁴ Members of several of the other Parisian academies also recognized the merit and activities of this provincial society. The eminent scientist and philanthropist Bailly and

³³ The book, by a M. Beaufleury, was published in Paris in 1789. The passage is quoted in Bloch, L'Assistance, p. 214, note 2.

³⁴ For an account of the speech made to the Paris Academy on 17 July 1783 see the Mercure de France for 2 August 1783, pp. 30-31.

the astronomer Pingré, who were members of the Paris Académie des Sciences, entered into correspondence with the Châlons society, becoming associate members in early 1780, sending it copies of their most recent works, and even attending its meetings.³⁵ So, too, did Vicq d'Azyr correspond with the Academy. Long an admirer and friend of the Academy's Dr Navier, d'Azyr in 1778 became perpetual secretary of the Société royale de Médecine which had, with Necker's support, just obtained its letters patent of establishment and whose director was one of the original appointments to his commission on hospital reform. Vicq d'Azyr remained a useful link for the Academy to the Paris society which, encouraged by Necker, systematically drew upon contacts with provincial doctors like Navier, to collect and coordinate information submitted from the provinces to promote public health.³⁶ Royal academies in the provinces also sought to establish ties to the Châlons society; the permanent secretaries of the academies of Besançon, Dijon, Nîmes, Orléans and Toulouse sent copies of their proceedings as did the literary society at Arras and the Société de

³⁵ Bailly was eventually a member of both the Académie des Sciences and of the Académie Française (from 1784). He became an associate member of the Châlons Academy in 1780. His regard for its work can be seen in a letter he wrote soon after (enclosing a copy of a recent work) saying that he hoped to be able to 'me rendre digne de l'honneur de partager des travaux entièrement tournés du côté de l'avantage public, comme l'annoncent assez tous les programmes du prix que vous proposés'. AD Marne I J 209 - letter of 30 January 1781. Pingré was a corresponding member of the Science Academy, librarian of St Geneviève, and eventually chancellor of the University.

³⁶ See, for example, his letter of 15 September 1782 - AD Marne I J 49. For more information on the role of the royal medical society in the government's work of reform and its use of savants and health professionals in the provinces to monitor and coordinate research to monitor and treat national and regional epidemics see Bloch, L'Assistance, pp. 227 and 236-38.

la Marine. Many of their members also actively sought to promote themselves as associate members of the Châlons society.³⁷

Several of the agricultural societies, which had been founded in the sixties under the auspices of the Châlons society's old mentor, Bertin, also wrote to the Academy following the success of its public competitions. Functioning, as the academies, under government sponsorship, these bodies had been assigned the task of promoting agriculture and solving the problems of rural society; they seem to have wanted to make common cause with the academicians at Châlons because of their shared commitment to finding practical means of promoting the welfare of France's producers and eliminating the fiscal, financial and social burdens effecting their productivity and reducing many to the precarious expedient of rural industry. The Academy developed ties to the thriving Société d'Agriculture of Limoges as well as to the Paris Société d'Agriculture, which used the good offices of Rouillé d'Orfeuil to petition the Châlons society to enter into regular correspondence with it, urging it to recognize that in the mutual exchange of useful information they could work together to 'mériter les bontés et la protection du Roy' and 'acquérir le droit à l'amour et à la reconnaissance des peuples'. The last letter in the Academy's files from the Paris society pleas: 'aidons-nous réciproquement à remplir l'objet de notre institution'.³⁸

Foreign academicians also beat a path to the Academy's door and it counted among its associate members the likes of Samuel Formey, permanent

³⁷ The possibility of obtaining a copy of the Academy's résumé on begging was for some of them a compelling reason to establish such links. See, for example, the letter from the vice-secretary of the Academy at Toulouse, dated 2 May 1781 - AD Marne I J 209.

³⁸ AD Marne I J 210 - letter dated 1 May 1784. On its links to the Limoges society see I J 47 - letter of 26 May 1780.

secretary to the Berlin Academy, and Reginaldo, permanent secretary to the Etruscan Academy at Cortone, whose links to the society were through its secretary Sabbathier. The Châlons society also welcomed as associate members correspondents from academies or institutes in Mannheim, Venice, Florence and Göteborg in Sweden. However, the Academy received the most convincing international recognition for its work on behalf of the poor when the Société royale de Madrid wrote to request that it be sent a copy of the Academy's résumé of the essays on begging, explaining that the Spanish academy hoped to use it as a model for their own prize competition on the topic in 1781. This request was couched in terms which must have helped persuade the Châlons academicians that their activities on behalf of the poor and the social utilitarian orientation of their inquiries had begun to enjoy influence even beyond France's borders, for the letter from the Madrid society concluded: 'Votre corps a montré aux autres institutions le chemin de soulager les hommes et de les occuper aux sciences vraiment intéressantes'.³⁹

The reputation earned for the Academy by its first résumé also appeared to have reached as far as Louis XVI, or at least his librarian (who was also brother-in-law to the Keeper of the Seals Miromesnil), for in October of 1781 Sabbathier received a letter from Bignon, 'bibliothécaire de sa Majesté', reminding him that if the Châlons Academy sent him copies of its résumés, he could make them available 'au plus grand nombre des savans'

³⁹ AD Marne I J 48 - a letter which reached the Academy through the office of the Spanish ambassador. See Isser Woloch, Eighteenth-Century Europe, p. 156, for reference to the efforts being made by the Spanish government to bring relief under the authority of the State, as well as the recent account by José Jesús García Hourcade of 'L'Assistance en Espagne selon Los Amigos des país' in Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 311 (1993), 233-42.

who, he assured the secretary, 'vous en rendront hommage'. His letter concluded: ' J'espère que vous voudrez bien en enrichir notre dépôt.'⁴⁰

The Academy had worked hard to get its résumés before 'personnes en place' and had targeted magistrates and administrators directly involved in the introduction of reforms to public health, public order or the registration of these reforms into law with copies of its first résumé. But the Academy also enjoyed favour among members of the First Estate, some of whom as either parish priest or bishop expressed active interest in the opinions and conclusions thrown up by its contests. A curé from Anjou, who would submit an essay for the Academy's competition on the plight of the labouring poor, wrote the society urging it to distribute its résumé because of the practical use to which lower clergy could put its insights: 'Les curés du royaume qui travaillent au bonheur de leurs paroissiens désirent ardamment lire un ouvrage couronné, qui leur donneroit sans doute des instructions bonnes à communiquer'.⁴¹ And from a correspondent in Paris came word of the high regard the society's work had gained for it among more eminent members of society, particularly ecclesiastical society:

L'Académie de Chaalons a grande réputation à Paris. Plusieurs personnes de la plus haute considération entr'autres M^{gr} l'évêque d'Arras qui a beaucoup d'esprit et de connoissance m'ont dit qu'elles seroient plus flattées d'être admises à cette académie qu'à l'Académie française.⁴²

⁴⁰ AD Marne I J 209.

⁴¹ AD Marne I J 50.

⁴² AD Marne I J 209. The bishop of Arras, L.-F.-M. de Conzié, became an honorary member of the Châlons Academy 30 May 1781. The Academy eventually counted a large number of senior churchmen among its honorary members: d'Albaret, bishop of Sarlat; Beauvais, bishop of Senez; Bernis, cardinal archbishop of Albi; Lastic, bishop of Rieux; La Luzerne, bishop of Langres; Le Clerc de Juigné, bishop of Châlons then Archbishop of Paris; Lomenie de Brienne, archbishop of Toulouse; Nélis, bishop of Anvers; du Tillet, bishop of Orange. Its greatest ally in Paris was the Archbishop who, through his vicaire-général Malvaux, intervened actively on the Academy's behalf on several occasions.

In this same letter, written in April of 1782, the correspondent informed the Academy's secretary that,

Le livre de l'académie sur la mendicité est plus estimé que jamais. Il réunit même aujourd'hui tous les suffrages de la capitale. [...] Il est devenu le manuel de toutes les personnes chargées de l'administration publique. Voilà le titre qu'on lui donne.⁴³

The writer then went on to encourage the Academy to publish essays sent to it for its subsequent competitions, assuring it that they, too, would find a ready readership in the capital.

The Academy's impression of the growing reputation of its contests and of the public's eagerness to consult its published findings was reinforced throughout these early years by senior figures at court and in the government who in their letters to the Academy seemed to share the conviction, expressed by public, publicists, philanthropists, administrators and activists, that the Châlons contests were providing a useful public service. From the beginning the Academy had regularly received letters of praise and encouragement for its competitions and activities from those who had authorized its public existence and who by their positions in government and at court enjoyed the power to make use of the opinions brought together in its contests to influence the direction and formation of government policy. Its protector, the duc de Bourbon, having congratulated the Academy in 1777 on the success of its first competition, wrote again in 1778 (after he had received the Academy's list

The Academy's honorary members also included the Prince de Soubise, several ambassadors, four former or serving Controller/Director Generals (Bertin, Turgot, Necker, de Clugny), the duc and the baron de Choiseul, as well as the ministers Sartine, Trudaine and (from 1787) the baron de Breteuil, and presidents of the parlements of Bordeaux and Metz (Le Berthon and Hocquart) and the former avocat général of the Dijon parlement Guyton de Morveau. Whenever possible Malvaux and Sabbathier attempted to use these contacts to advance the society's interests.

⁴³ AD Marne I J 209 - letter from Paté dated 22 April 1782. The emphasis has not been added but was his.

of forthcoming competitions -- on reforms to the corvée, to criminal laws and on the provision of popular education), with the comment: 'Je vois avec une vraie satisfaction qu'elle [the Academy] fait toujours un choix heureux dans les sujets qu'elle indique pour ses prix'.⁴⁴ A few days earlier the Academy had received a similar acknowledgement from Bertin, who commended the society for using its contests to focus the minds of men of letters on useful, humanitarian questions: 'en applaudissant à vos travaux et au zèle que vous montrez pour exciter l'emulation et diriger les vues des gens de lettres sur les objets les plus utiles et les plus intéressants pour l'humanité'.⁴⁵ Bertin wrote again in 1779 and 1780 and although he was on the point of leaving government (he retired as minister in 1780), the Academy believed it could rely on the continued support of this innovative and enlightened minister as well as on that of other prominent ministers and of several of its honorary members who were themselves either one-time ministers or their advisers, who still had influence at court, and who like Bertin expressed active personal interest in the Academy's essay contests and its relations with the larger literate public.

One such member was the duc de Choiseul, with whom Sabbathier had enjoyed cordial relations since 1764. Sabbathier had been approached privately in 1778 by the baron de Choiseul, who was also an honorary member of the society, with the suggestion that he and his cousin would be willing personally to fund two extraordinary essay competitions whose prizes would be awarded in 1780.⁴⁶ Although they requested that their sponsorship for these contests be kept secret, the willingness of one of the nation's most eminent former ministers (and his ambassador cousin) to propose and fund

⁴⁴ AD Marne I J 195 - letter dated 14 September 1778.

⁴⁵ Ibid - letter dated 5 September 1778.

⁴⁶ AD Marne I J 208.

one of the Academy's essay competitions seems to have convinced Sabbathier, Malvaux, and all those in the Academy privy to this information that the society was at last in a position to influence those with the power to effect change nationally.⁴⁷ Within only two years of gaining their

⁴⁷ Virtually all the money which the Academy received to fund subsequent prizes came in the period immediately following its first public essay contest or publication of its contest résumé. The Choiseuls gave 1200 livres to sponsor two competition prizes, the first on how Champagne could best be administered, and the second on the how to best reform French criminal laws and practices. But the Choiseuls were not alone among the society's honorary members in providing the impecunious Academy with the money it needed to offer its contest prizes. Le Berthon, first president of the parlement of Bordeaux, spent several months in exile in Châlons in late 1781 as a result of his dispute with the Crown over the 'Dupaty affair'; during his sojourn in the city he was introduced into the Academy as an honorary member and provided the company with 600 livres to fund a prize on how to promote the growth of commerce in Champagne, a question which was first posed for 1783 and then posed again, in slightly altered form, for 1785, 1786 and 1788, by which time Le Berthon had doubled the prize money to 1200 livres. AD Marne I J 195 - séance for 12 December 1781.

The outsider who contributed most to the competitions of the Academy both materially and intellectually was not an honorary but an active associate member of the society called Élie de Beaumont. A celebrated Paris lawyer whose name had been made when he had been engaged by Mme Calas (through Voltaire) and obtained a post mortem reversal of the conviction of Jean Calas, Élie de Beaumont put up the money for three of the Châlons Academy's competitions (and would assist the Academy in preparation of two of its contest résumés). In a letter he sent to the Academy in December of 1780 offering it 800 livres to fund prizes he hoped could be awarded in 1781 and 1782, the lawyer confessed that it was 'la Bienfaisance de cette célèbre compagnie' in promoting the cause of the indigent through its first essay competition and its published résumé of the resulting essays which had recommended its activities to him and prompted his desire to associate himself with the society. The first competition, for 1781, was to be on a subject directly related to his own concern to further the rights of those falsely accused, the second (for 1782-83) was to be an extension of the Academy's first successful competition, canvassing the public for its views on how to promote the welfare of the labouring poor. AD Marne I J 195 - letter of 24 December 1780. Brissot alludes to Élie de Beaumont's funding of the prize for 1781 in his correspondence with the perpetual secretary of the Besançon Academy where he described the 'anonymous' donor of the prize money for this contest as one 'qui plus d'une fois avoit eu le bonheur de sauver des innocents, qui plus d'une fois avoit été le témoin des erreurs sanglantes de la justice'. (Brissot, Correspondance et Papiers, p. 16.) Élie de Beaumont's final donation of prize money came in December of 1785 when he gave 400 livres for a contest announced for 1787 on the best way of promoting patriotism in a monarchy, a subject on which he had published an essay in 1777.

In each instance mentioned above the Academy was requested to guard the anonymity of the donors, whose identities have here been established

letters-patent as an academy and of announcing their first public essay competition the Châlons Academy seemed, remarkably, already to have gained the ear of those in -- or on the fringes of -- power; and the academicians seemed determined to use this access to the powerful to articulate the needs of the larger nation as expressed through the memoirs submitted by the informed Frenchmen writing for their annual essay contests.

The serving minister who, after Bertin, appeared to the Châlons academicians to be most attentive to their contests and whose fiscal, administrative, judicial and educational reforms found obvious resonance in the reform questions which were the focus of the Academy's public inquiries was the Director General of Finance himself. Such was the Châlons academicians' confidence in Necker's support for their activities and contests that when in the autumn of 1779 the time came to raise the funds to cover the cost of printing the Academy's résumé of the essays sent for its second public competition (on the reform of the corvée) the Academy petitioned the Director General -- and persuaded Rouillé d'Orfeuil to support its request -- to authorize the printing of its new book 'avec les autres ouvrages que l'on imprime pour le service de sa Majesté aux frais de la province' on the grounds that 'ce travail [est] important pour le soulagement des peuples'.⁴⁸ Although Necker replied that he was unable to obtain permission for this expenditure from official funds, because of the precedent it might seem to establish in the eyes of other bodies, he

through use of collateral correspondence.

⁴⁸ The phrases come from the Academy's letters to Necker and to d'Orfeuil, which are exactly the same except for the following, which it appended to its letter to the Intendant: 'Oseroit-elle (the Academy) espérer, Monsieur, que vous voudrez bien lui en procurer les moyens en déterminant M. le Directeur Général des finances à permettre que ce résumé soit imprimé avec les autres ouvrages que l'on imprime [...] aux frais de la province.' AD Marne I J 195 -letters dated 30 August 1779.

offered his own personal resources and endorsement for the Academy's projected publication, expressing the hope that 'en souscrivant pour vingt exemplaires, je puis concourir au but de l'académie'.⁴⁹

AN AGENDA FOR REFORM

Given the extent of public and ministerial interest in its first contests and the reception and publicity accorded the publication of its first collection of contest essays, the Academy was perhaps not unsurprisingly persuaded that its public competitions were proving useful to those in government, in government service and in the country at large who were like them willing to work to support the movement toward reform. In the introduction Malvaux prepared and published as preface for the Academy's résumé to the essays from its first contest, he had confidently set forth the Academy's understanding of the scale and scope of reforms needed if ordinary, labouring French people were to be spared the plight of the indigent and given hope of sufficiency and security. Summarizing in brief virtually all the topics it would treat in its subsequent essay competitions, the Academy in this introduction adumbrated a reform agenda

⁴⁹ AD Marne I J 195 - letter dated 23 September 1779. In a second letter, written the same day and referring back to the Academy's petition and its claim that it was already being pressed by the public to publish a résumé of the memoirs for this contest, the minister added encouragingly, 'je ne suis point étonné de l'empressement que l'on témoigne de connoître les mémoires qu'elle a couronnés sur l'objet des corvées'. AD Marne I J 208 - letter dated 23 September 1779.

It was Necker who, in a letter of 15 July 1777, had originally gained royal consent for the Academy's annual government subsidy of 1000 livres; in the letter authorizing d'Orfeuil to make this disbursement, Necker recounted how he had 'fait valoir auprès de sa Majesté le zèle de cette académie pour tout ce qui peut contribuer au bien public', adding, 'sa Majesté [...] auroit désiré qu'il eût été possible de lui accorder d'avantage et elle le fera, si les circonstances deviennent par la suite plus favorables'. The letter, addressed to Champagne's intendant, was reported by him to the Academy. AD Marne C 1768.

which reflected many of the reform initiatives which had been or were being essayed by senior ministers and officials. The posing of each of these reforms individually as topics to be discussed one after another in its forthcoming series of public competitions seemed to the Academy an ideal way for it to give its own and the public's support to the Crown for measures its reforming ministers appeared determined to introduce. And the Academy's introduction to its first published contest essays had made it evident that the members of this royal society considered the reform measures they were putting forward for public discussion in their contests both necessary and virtually inevitable if their young king were to honour his expressed commitments to promote the welfare of all his people. Moreover, the questions which the Academy posed for national consideration in the years following its first successful competition had, like its first question on what society owed the indigent, grown out of its members' own efforts as local professionals, civic or religious leaders or government officials to find workable solutions to the social, economic, fiscal and administrative problems which they had encountered in their own town and region over the last several decades. Professional responsibilities and contacts and the response the Academy had received to its first contest nationally had persuaded these men that the issues and problems which they were facing locally were common to the country at large and therefore matters which could be usefully considered by a broader enlightened citizenry.

Canvassing the nation for the views of those who like themselves were practical men who understood the nature and persistence of these problems may have seemed logical to the Châlons academicians. However, it also demonstrated their near-total lack of political understanding. As an official body, with royal warrant, working under the guidance of a

provincial intendant and with the seeming blessing of France's senior ministers, the Academy was offering anyone who could write the opportunity to voice his or her views on any of the problems or reform issues raised by recent government initiatives or by the opposition these initiatives incurred from those whose interests they impinged. Linked too explicitly to the government's efforts to impose reforms on vested interests or to create new institutions which could circumvent the opposition of these groups, competition questions which from Châlons seemed both practical and useful came to be seen in Paris and Versailles as dangerously political -- especially since, as would be the case in the contests held during this interim period, the resulting essays were contributed, for the most part, by those who were well-educated professionals, knowledgeable about the issues they were discussing, and able advocates of reform. By giving men like these the opportunity to express their views on matters beyond the permitted influence of either academy or essay public, the men in Châlons jeopardized not only the future of their academy --and that of some of their essay competitors -- but that of reformers within Crown service whose initiatives they were writing to support. In the process the Academy and the most astute of its essay competitors gained a more sophisticated understanding of the realities of political expediency and the public limits to reform even in the enlightened reign of Louis XVI. The pages which follow provide a summary history of the Academy's activities and intentions in posing its other contests questions, revealing in the process something of the political education of the Châlons academicians and their essay competitors and offering some evidence of the role that these competitions may have played in the movement in France from reform to revolution.

During its annual séance publique in August of 1777, when the Châlons Academy named the winner of its competition on the begging poor, it also announced the topic of its prize competition for the following year, inviting the public to offer its views on 'les moyens les moins onéreux à l'Etat et aux peuples de construire et entretenir les grands chemins'. The Academy's announcement came only eighteen months after Louis XVI's endorsement of the edict suppressing the corvée and proposing the levy of a general tax payable by all proprietors to cover the cost of building and maintaining public roads; but it had also been a mere twelve months since parlement had succeeded in reversing that edict and engineering the dismissal of Turgot and the fiscal principles he had set out to establish. The question which the Châlons Academy proposed for its second prize essay competition could thus scarcely have been more topical. And so, following the enormous success of its first contest, the Academy soon received more than forty essays, many of which had been written by members of the royal corps of engineers and therefore by men well-placed to offer detailed and practical information about the disadvantages for the state and for the people of roads built by forced corvée.

Yet, by the middle of the summer of 1778 the judging academicians had decided that despite the obvious technical merit of many of the essays, the competitors had on the whole failed to grasp the political orientation the Academy had given to the question. So, in its public meeting in August of that year the Academy announced that it was extending the deadline for the submission of essays for its competition to the first of May 1779 and doubling the prize money to 600 livres. The Academy advised those who had competed for the 1778 prize that they were free to reclaim their essays; but it also informed them, along with other members of the public who might compete, that they would be wise to give particular attention to the terms

within which the Academy hoped they would cast their responses. The circulars and advertisements announcing the 1779 contest italicized in print those aspects of their question to which they hoped essayists would give special prominence:

L'Académie invite les Auteurs à ne point s'occuper à prouver l'utilité des Chemins, parce que tout le monde en convient, (ou au moins que ce ne soit pas l'objet principal de leur travail), mais à indiquer les moyens les moins onéreux à l'État & au Peuple, les plus faciles dans l'exécution, & les plus simples dans la forme, pour construire & entretenir les grands Chemins, & principalement les moyens qui pourroient procurer un soulagement aux pauvres manouvriers, dans le cas où les Auteurs adopteroient la construction & l'entretien des Chemins par Corvées.⁵⁰

Obviously convinced that the shaping of public opinion was a function as legitimate for a royal academy as was its role in providing a forum in which enlightened Frenchmen could express their views, the Châlons society by these instructions made explicit the political nature of the humanitarian reformism implicit in the wording of its initial announcement of this question: the responsibilities and interests of State and people were to be recognized and related, administration was to be simplified and, above all, poor working people were to be relieved.

The burden imposed on labouring people by the corvée had been frequently cited by those competing in the Academy's first competition as a factor contributing to the impoverishment of the peasantry; it was now being singled out as a topic requiring more detailed comment and the Academy seemed intent on drawing out the political consequences for the nation of both the government's original announcement of the edict abolishing the corvée and of its subsequent reversal of this legislation.

⁵⁰ Prix proposés par l'Académie des Sciences, Arts & Belles-Lettres de Châlons-sur-Marne, dans son Assemblée publique du 25 Août 1778, p. 2. The italicization is the Academy's and was so printed in the leaflet it circulated announcing its prize.

From public and private statements it made during the period in which it was proposing the question and judging the memoirs it received for its second prize essay contest, it is clear that the Academy hoped to use this competition question as a means of giving the Crown -- and those reforming ministers presently in government and within the privileged orders -- the public support necessary resolutely to pursue this and other reforms affecting the fiscal exemptions of the privileged. While awaiting authorization for the publication of its second collection of contest essays, the Academy appointed the Abbé Malvaux to prepare its résumé of the contest essays and to draft its introduction to these documents.⁵¹ This manuscript reveals much about the Academy's intent in proposing for public discussion the subject of the government's recent efforts to reform the corvée.

Trop heureuse si pour prix de son zèle l'académie le voit efficacement secondé des hommes d'état que le cri de l'humanité invite à cette attendrissante réforme et à ceux qui par la générosité de leur sacrifice peuvent plus aisément obtenir de la bienfaisance et de la justice de notre auguste monarque l'acte paternel qui peut[-être] justifierait le mieux la continuité de ses efforts vers le bien public.⁵²

⁵¹ This unsigned manuscript, included among the papers in the Academy's dossiers of essays submitted for the renewed competition of 1779, can be read in AD Marne I J 44. It appears to be in two if not three hands and seems likely to be the work, in the first instance, of Malvaux, whom the Academy appointed to the task in January of 1780, and then revised and reworked by the abbé Roussel and the associate member Morisse. For the Academy's appointment of Malvaux see its proceedings of 26 January 1780 - AD Marne I J 195.

⁵² Ibid. This manuscript provides remarkable insight into the Academy's stated purpose in holding this competition: the academician editor openly acknowledged that the Academy's intent in posing the question had been to draw public attention to the political implications of recent events and to a reform which it believed had left 'dans les âmes sensibles de profondes impressions'. By gathering together the views of an enlightened public writing specifically on the reform, the Academy hoped that the movement of opinion in favour of suppression of the corvée would succeed in 'acquérant insensiblement de nouvelles forces' and, in the process, the Academy would have the privilege of assisting in what it described as 'le triomphe de la vérité et de la justice'.

In thus declaring itself the Academy was echoing the views of its protector Rouillé d'Orfeuil who had given the Academy the money it needed to fund this prize and who from the first had himself strongly seconded Turgot's views about the injustice of the corvée, recommending that the privileged should be required to contribute to the cost of the national system of public roads. Common to Turgot's edict, d'Orfeuil's administrative practice, and the decision of the Academy to pose this question was a shared conviction that road construction by corvée was socially and economically unjust, practically inefficient, and a potential source of popular unrest and social disorder because it forced those who had nothing but their labour -- or their labour and inadequate land -- to work unpaid to build roads which most benefited those exempted from this hated fiscal duty. Its abolition was a reform which Necker too endorsed, and which he was soon attempting to impose upon the assembly in Berry, instructing them to alter administratively what it had been impossible for Turgot to impose legislatively through the Paris Parlement.⁵³

The academicians who drafted the society's introduction to the memoirs it eventually received for this contest admitted that when the Academy published its second and revised circular announcing this competition it had hoped that the public would grasp

clairement dans la simplicité des derniers termes de cette Enonciation quelles étoient ses véritables vues [...] sur la partie politique que l'académie avoit particulièrement en vue et telles qu'elle les attendoit des citoyens animés de la sensibilité la plus pure et la plus éclairée.⁵⁴

And from summary statements made in the draft introduction it seems that those who responded to this second announcement did indeed understand the Academy's intent and shared its views about the injustice of the corvée and

⁵³ See Harris, Necker, pp. 184-87 and 191.

⁵⁴ AD Marne I J 44.

its conviction that Louis XVI should be led to see the political implications of the reversal of the edict abolishing the royal corvée. 'Aucun des concurrents n'a cru qu'on fût fondé à exiger de l'homme qui n'a que des bras qu'il sacrifia lui et sa famille aux jouissances d'agrément des classes supérieures de la société', the editor reported.

On verra que tous ont au contraire fini par désirer unanimement avec elle [the Academy] que des dispositions de justice et [these last three words were lined out] de bienfaisance par lesquelles notre Auguste Monarque signale sa justice dès le commencement de son règne en supprimant les corvées ne fussent plus aussi longtemps stériles et sans effet qu'elles l'ont été jusqu'ici.⁵⁵

The reform essayed by the national government under Turgot and Necker to the way in which public works currently performed by corvée were to be altered was, however, but one of the many reform initiatives which the Châlons Academy hoped to use its public essay contests to support. During the same meeting in which the Academy announced it would give the public another year to submit its views on reform of the corvée, it also first announced the topic of its third public essay competition:

Quel serait le meilleur plan d'éducation pour le peuple?

⁵⁵ Ibid. The Academy received 41 essays in 1778 and 36 when the competition was extended until 1779 (of these 36 essays, 9 were revisions or supplements to essays submitted in 1778). There were, therefore, 68 different competitors writing on the corvée questions, 53 of whom have been identified by name. Forty-eight have been identified socially -- 30 were from the Third Estate and of these engineers, lawyers and government administrators represented the most significant professional groups. Sixty manuscripts have survived more or less intact, 6 as extracts made by the Academy, and one in printed form. Nine essays are missing altogether. Although it is not possible here to analyze these contest essays, the most surprising feature of these manuscripts memoirs is not their common insistence on the injustice and inefficiency of the corvée, but their open criticism of the privileged, and in particular the Paris Parlement, for their opposition to Turgot's reform and for the anachronistic arguments they presented to defend their privilege not to contribute to a public utility from which rich consumers and those with landed wealth benefited most.

The prize for this third contest was to be awarded in August of 1779 at the same time as the prize for its second competition. And, even as the Academy was circulating information about the terms of its competition on educational reform, it was also in the process of making at least some of its views on the topic known to the public. In the résumé of the essays it had received for its first contest on the plight of the indigent, which included a chapter on 'L'abolition des Corvées considérée comme un moyen de détruire la Mendicité', Malvaux also included several chapters on education as a means of improving the lot of ordinary people. He approvingly quoted the essayist Montlinot who had insisted that all foundlings be taught a trade by the age of twenty and that schools should be established in all towns, at public expense, to teach the children of the urban poor a trade so that technical education could give them a means of making a living and thus compensate for the otherwise grim economic prospects they would face without land or skills.⁵⁶ And in between the passages he drew from Montlinot's essay Malvaux inserted statements which clearly conveyed the Academy's views on the topic. 'En général, on soigne trop peu dans l'Europe l'éducation du peuple', he began. 'On a part-tout élevé à grands frais, des monumens superbes où l'on enseigne le Latin & le Grec' but 'on laisse dans l'oubli les arts mécaniques qui sont si nécessaires, la seule ressource du peuple'. Without any provision for them to be taught either basic literacy or a trade, the poor of town and countryside were left with no means of supporting themselves when the most basic agricultural or manual work was in short supply. And so the Academy endorsed the view that 'collèges d'art et metiers aux enfans du peuple' be opened, at least in large towns 'où on donneroit gratuitement des leçons pratiques sur les arts les plus communes dont les procédés sont simples';

⁵⁶ Les Moyens de détruire la mendicité (1780 edition), pp. 277-79.

and again like Montlinot, the Academy maintained that these schools should be 'entretenus par les citoyens' who would fund popular education and training in recognition of the principle, central to the reasoning of the Châlons academicians, that 'le bien de l'État n'est que la somme des biens particuliers, & qu'il n'est pas de bonheur pour le peuple sans travail'.⁵⁷

The Academy also used its 'begging' résumé to advance its views on education for women and girls, a topic which it would not propose officially for competition until later in the eighties.⁵⁸ But in 1778 the Academy was already insisting that young women, from both the popular and the comfortable classes, be given greater access to skilled work through better and more advanced education and more open access to certain occupations. It deplored in print the social and the legal prejudice against women in the professions and trades -- 'nos moeurs, notre

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 279.

⁵⁸ 5 December 1781 the Academy voted to pose for its competition of 1783 the question 'Quel serait le meilleur plan d'éducation pour les femmes' offering as prize 300 livres. AD Marne I J 195. By the time the contest was held, word of the Academy's disfavour had begun to spread and it received only eight essays, one of which was by the engineering officer Choderlos de Laclos, whose Les Liaisons dangereuse had appeared the previous year. The government prevented the Academy from publishing the essays it received for this contest. However, the Academy did manage to judge the essays it received and in the process made notes on the content of each essay; thus although most of the essays are missing from the Academy's files -- in all probability as a result of the government's censorship -- the Academy's notes have survived and from these we discover that, despite the government's efforts to alter the popular focus of the Academy's competitions, the interests of the popular classes remained central to its concerns. For example, commenting on the essay which they considered worthy of an 'accessit', the Academy noted that although the essay contained useful views 'nous luy reprocherons cependant d'avoir omis de parler dans son mémoire de l'éducation des femmes du peuple, soit des villes, soit des campagnes'. AD Marne I J 51.

The government permitted the Academy to award its prize and to announce the name of its prize-winner, Jean-François Dumas, a lawyer from Lons-le-Saulnier. However, since the government had withdrawn the Academy's publishing privilege, Dumas had his essay, Discours sur cette question: Quels sont les moyens de perfectionner l'éducation des jeunes demoiselles, published in Neuchâtel in 1783. Laclos's essay, which survives only in fragmentary form, did not appear in print until 1903, when it was edited by Édouard Champion after the manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale.

législation même, l'écartent d'une infinité de fonctions lucratives, en lui fermant l'entrée des charges & des emplois, en un mot de presque tous les débouchés'⁵⁹ -- and listed at length all the areas of French economic life from which women were excluded, before recommending that the government supervise entry into specific occupations -- like midwifery, nursing and teaching, but also industrial and textile design, music and drawing and the liberal arts; some, like midwifery, were eventually to become the preserve of trained female practitioners. As in so many areas of what it considered public life, the Academy in this résumé thus advanced views that would involve more government intervention to foster the welfare of the labouring people and, coincidentally, impinge on the preserves of the privileged. Not only did it want France's young, both male and female, to be given education that would offer them the possibility of at least basic literacy and numeracy skills as well as technical training in 'collèges d'arts et metiers' and 'maisons d'apprentissage gratuit pour tous les arts utiles'; it also used its résumé publicly to advocate a change in social values and institutions so that those currently disadvantaged be given access to education and work.⁶⁰

Such were the Châlons Academy's views on educational reform when in August of 1778 it asked the public to propose schemes for its prize contest of 1779 on how the people could be provided with education. Within months it had received sixteen essays on this question. However, as it had found in the first round of memoirs submitted for its competition on the corvée, the Academy was dismayed to discover that the essays it was being sent on educational reform were falling far short of its expectations in posing the question. So instead of announcing its prize winner for this contest in

⁵⁹ Les Moyens de détruire la mendicité, p. 438.

⁶⁰ Ibid, pp. 437-45 (p. 444).

August of 1779, the Academy extended the deadline for essays for its third contest to August of 1781 and offered the public not one but two prizes of 300 livres each. Scarcely concealing its disappointment at the way in which competitors had interpreted its first announcement, the Academy printed a new circular to advise the public of the renewed competition and doubled prize, emphasizing (for those who might otherwise miss the significance of the wording of their question) the social, economic and political importance of popular education and justifying the new deadline by reminding potential competitors that 'un sujet aussi intéressant pour la partie la plus nombreuse & la plus utile de la Nation mérite sans doute d'être traité avec toute la maturité convenable'. The Academy also insisted upon the originality of its inquiry. Contrasting its views with those of earlier educational reformers and, by implication, with the sixteen who had submitted essays for the 1779 deadline, the Academy stated explicitly the kind of reform essays it now hoped to receive:

On a imaginé les plus beaux systèmes, on a formé les Plans les plus magnifiques pour l'Education Physique, Politique & Morale de la partie brillante & de la partie aisée de la Nation; & on a dédaigné jusqu'ici de s'occuper de l'Education du Peuple. Une fausse, disons mieux, une barbare Politique a même assez peu respecté l'humanité pour mettre en question s'il ne seroit pas plus avantageux de le laisser dans une ignorance absolue, que de l'éclairer. L'Académie persuadée qu'un Peuple ignorant ne peut être qu'un Peuple vicieux, & par conséquent malheureux, propose de discuter Quel seroit le meilleur plan d'éducation pour le Peuple? [...] L'Académie invite les Auteurs à ne s'occuper uniquement que de l'éducation du Peuple, à former un plan qui soit sur-tout simple, d'une exécution facile, & dégagée de tout les détails qui ne seront pas nécessaires à la chose.⁶¹

The Academy could scarcely have made a clearer statement of its view of those who disdained the people, disregarding their contribution to national life. Nor could it have provided a simpler testimony as to its own commitment to the long-term task of seeking practical insights which could

⁶¹ Prix Proposés par l'Académie [...] 25 Août 1778. The Academy italicized only the wording of its actual contest question.

be used to improve the prospects of ordinary people. But in this task the Academy and its essay competitors would be obliged once again to wait in silence for a more opportune moment to speak out in the interest of the people through a published résumé of their views for, as we shall see, the government was to intervene to prevent publication of the essays submitted for this contest.⁶²

In the same circular of 1778 in which it readvertised its competition on the corvée and announced the contest on popular education the Academy also publicized the first of three successive questions on legal or judicial reform. For a prize to be awarded in 1780 it asked:

Quelles pourroient être en France les loix pénales les moins sévères, & cependant les plus efficaces, pour contenir & réprimer le crime, par des châtimens prompts & exemplaires, en ménageant l'honneur & la liberté des Citoyens?

Having learned from experience that its role in the work of advancing reform was not limited to providing a forum in which the public's views

⁶² Because of the government's confiscation of at least some of the essays submitted for this contest over the two years, it is difficult to establish the number of competitors with absolute certainty; however, correspondence in the Academy's files would seem to indicate that twenty different competitors submitted essays, nine of them sending in 1779 revised versions of their essays of 1778. The most notable competitors were J.-P. Brissot, Philippon de la Madelaine, Goyon d'Arzac (who won the Academy's prize), Gosselin and Guyton de Morveau (who submitted a 'Lettre sur l'Influence de l'Education' which had been written prior to the Academy's competition) and very possibly Jacques Sellier. The winning essay, 'Essai de Laopédie ou Plan d'éducation pour le peuple', was among those confiscated by the government and can be consulted, along with two of the Academy's other prize-winning essays, in BN fonds français 22048 which bears the notice 'Police d'Etat. 3 Mémoires couronnés à l'Académie de Chaalons sur Marne et dont la publication a été empêchée par le Gouvernement à cause de leur sujet'.

For a discussion of 'enlightened' attitudes towards the education of the popular classes, including analysis of the views of some of the men who wrote for the Châlons Academy's first contest on the subject, see Harvey Chisick, The Limits of Reform in the Enlightenment: Attitudes toward the Education of the Lower Classes in Eighteenth-Century France (Princeton University Press, 1981).

could be expressed but that, prior to this, the Academy had by the careful wording of its questions a crucial role in encouraging the literate public to produce essays which assumed the necessity of social and institutional change and addressed these changes from the perspective of the needs of ordinary Frenchmen, the Academy prefaced its announcement of this first question on legal reform with a series of ancillary question/statements which underlined the Academy's concern with both the prevalence of crime in French society, as opposed to other societies, and the failure of its laws and institutions to contain it.

Pourquoi se commet-il en France tant de vols, tant d'assassinats & tant d'autre crimes qui troublent la société, malgré la rigueur de nos Loix pénales, l'activité de notre Police, le zèle de nos Magistrats? Pourquoi même sont-ils plus fréquens parmi nous, que dans d'autres pays, où la douceur des Loix criminelles, la facilité de les interpréter en faveur du coupable, les asyles multipliés, une commisération religieuse, les préjugés nationaux, l'avilissement de la main-forte, en un mot où tout semble promettre l'impunité?

As was usual with the Châlons society, the wording of its main contest question implied reform. However, this time the Academy appears to have learned from problems encountered in earlier public essay competitions and therefore to have framed its main question with statements that made unmistakably clear to competitors the perspective from which the Academy hoped they would address proposed reforms: through its more elaborate contest announcement this royal provincial academy made explicit its view that France's existing criminal justice system had proved itself incapable of containing crime and that this failure was bound up with its refusal to recognize the natural human rights of French citizens. And, by placing the discussion of reforms in France's penal laws and institutions in the context both of the respect due to the civil rights of individual Frenchmen -- 'l'honneur et la liberté des citoyens' -- and of civil disorder it described as more pervasive in France than elsewhere, the Châlons Academy

invited the public not only to put forward its views on the need in France for a new and more effective criminal code; it also suggested that their examination of the laws and administration of justice could properly be set in the context of a reconsideration of France's civil laws, too, since critical analysis of the existing social and legal system seemed to indicate that an alarmingly large portion of the population was being forced outside society by its transgression of civil laws which themselves violated the individual's fundamental natural rights.

The Academy followed this question for its competition of 1780 with two further questions on judicial reform. For its contest of 1781 it asked:

Lorsque la société civile ayant accusé un de ses membres par l'organe du ministère public, succombe dans cette accusation, quels seroient les moyens les plus praticables et les moins dispendieux de procurer au citoyen reconnu innocent le dédommagement qui lui est dû de droit naturel?

And for 1782:

Quels seraient les moyens de rendre la justice en France avec le plus de célérité et le moins de frais possible?⁶³

⁶³ References to these three competitions, which were announced in the Academy's annual public meetings in August of 1778, 1779, 1780 and 1781, appeared in the Gazette de France, the Mercure de France; Affiches de Paris pour les provinces, the Gazette des Tribunaux, the Journal Courrier de l'Europe, and the Journal de Genève as well as in brochures it sent to Parisian and provincial academies and agricultural societies and sent upon request to interested individuals.

Because of government censorship and seizure of essays submitted for these contests (and, for the later contests, the competitors' own demands that their manuscripts be returned to them before they could fall into the wrong hands), it has not been possible either to recover all the manuscripts submitted for them or to establish definitive figures for the number of competitors; however, it seems likely from evidence in the files that 22 essays were submitted for the competition on penal laws, 17 on the rights of the falsely accused, and 12 (possibly 14) on reforms to judicial administration and procedure, with the decline in the number of competitors over the three years directly related to the spread, within the legal community, of word about the government's action against the Academy.

Using correspondence in the Academy's archives (particularly in AD Marne I J 47 and 49) and elsewhere I have established a list of the known contributors in the Academy's 'justice' contests. Although several essayists wrote for more than one of these contests, 29 different

The wording of these two contest questions reinforced the impression given by the Academy that it expected its contestants to present their programmes of legal and institutional reform within the context of general principles of natural law, of the rights of the individual citizen before the law, and of society's duty to provide its citizens with affordable and efficient legal redress. And, as in its first question on the topic, the Academy by the wording of its questions advised potential competitors that the inadequacy of the nation's system of public justice should provide the point of departure for their discussions.⁶⁴

The Academy's three questions on judicial reform undoubtedly reflected the influence of the literary campaign against the barbarity of French laws and procedures which had been led by men like Beccaria and Voltaire during the preceding twenty years. It also, and as usual for this Academy, reflected issues which had been brought to public notice by reforms which the government itself had briefly essayed in the period

individuals have been identified as having competed in one or more of them; those from the legal professions dominate with 9 presidial officers or administrative officers with judicial functions, 8 lawyers, 2 notaries, 1 senior magistrate and 1 'greffier'.

⁶⁴ Although, as might be expected, those who competed in these contests were virtually all vigorous advocates of judicial and legal reform who argued their cases with great skill, some were more radical in their arguments and language than others. The content of these essays cannot be analyzed within the limits of this present study, but a list of the names of some of the most well-known competitors will provide an indication of the richness of this material. Contestants included Daniel Jousse, J.-E.-D. Bernardi, L.-J.-B. Bucquet, Philippon de la Madeleine, Grouber de Groubental, Brissot de Warville and Petion de Villeneuve.

For further discussion of the literary style and content of some of the Châlons 'justice' essays and other eighteenth-century texts treating judicial or legal matters see Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink's excellent comparative study, Kriminalität und Literatur im Frankreich des 18. Jahrhunderts (Munich, R. Oldenbourg, 1983).

immediately preceding the Academy's elevation into a royal academy.⁶⁵ From the first the Châlons Academy had made no secret of its conviction that French laws and legal institutions should be radically reformed and that it was the poor who suffered most from the abuses inherent in the existing system. In its published résumé of its first contest's essays the Academy had included a long chapter on the topic, which began:

Qui le croiroit? la Justice qui n'a été donnée aux hommes que pour leur bonheur ne fait pour ainsi dire que les malheureux. Si elle n'étoit fatale qu'à l'oppresseur; & si elle venoit toujours au secours de la veuve & du pupile opprimés, elle seroit, comme elle doit l'être, la bienfaitrice du genre humain [...]. Mais son Temple n'est presque ouvert qu'à l'homme riche & puissant; & les avenues qui y mènent sont fermées à l'homme indigent & foible. Il seroit bien à désirer qu'enfin il se fît une réforme dans notre législation civile.⁶⁶

Irredeemably biased towards the rich and powerful and against the poor and vulnerable, French legal institutions and laws -- both civil and criminal -- were, according to this royal academy, so barbarous ('nées du sein de

⁶⁵ There is evidence that the question on reforms to the administration of justice had been in the mind of at least one academician, probably the abbé Delacourt, even in 1778, for on the list of questions proposed in that year is written in long-hand: 'Prix à proposer - Quels seroient les moyens d'empêcher les abus dans l'administration de la justice'. Delacourt read his 'Discours sur l'utilité d'une réforme dans nos lois civiles' in the Academy's annual séance publique of August 1779; this essay reflected reformist convictions he had acquired during his years as conseiller clerc first in the presidial court and then for three years on the Conseil supérieur established in Châlons in the aftermath of Maupeou's 'revolutionary' attack on Parlement and as a first step towards the reassertion of royal sovereignty over French laws and their administration. His fellow academicians, one quarter of whom had sat on the Maupeou court, had formally endorsed his views before the assembled public during that August meeting.

Although two of these competitions were funded by outside sources, the Abbé Delacourt appears to have been the driving force behind all three competitions on the reform of civil and criminal laws and procedures which the Academy eventually posed for public discussion; it was with him, rather than Sabbathier, that essayists like Brissot (who wrote essays for the first and second of these contests) discussed the finer points of proposed reforms and who suggested revisions to their essays. Correspondence about these contests is scattered throughout AD Marne I J 47 and 49 and I J 208 and 209.

⁶⁶ Malvaux, Les Moyens de détruire la mendicité, p. 426.

l'ignorance & de la barbarie'), so prejudicial to the welfare of the majority, and so singularly unreasonable, impractical and unenlightened that they could be described without exaggeration as conspiring to pervert rather than to uphold true justice: 'elles rendent arbitraires les notions du juste et de l'injuste'.⁶⁷ To those who read the Academy's full announcements for these three contests and who had also seen the Academy's résumé with its published statements like these on their subject, the rhetoric and rationale allowable in the essays in reform solicited by this royal body must have seemed surprisingly radical.

The Châlons academicians' reading of the reformist spirit of their age was made perhaps most explicit by the contest question, also first publicized in the circular they had printed in August of 1778, which announced the Academy's second extraordinary prize for 1780. The winner of this contest was to receive 600 livres for the best essay in response to the question:

Quels seroient les moyens les plus avantageux pour administrer la Champagne, d'après les vues du Roi, le génie, la situation, les productions, &c. de cette Province?

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 427. The Academy's correspondence with the competitors in these contests enables us to discover not only the essayists' views but also those of the judging academicians who, in their reports on the essays, register their own strong support for, for example, the establishment of uniform civil and criminal laws, the elimination of existing jurisdictions not directly under Crown authority and the provision of Crown courts in areas not currently served by them so that, with the elimination of independent venal judicial officers and the substitution for them of paid court officials who would render justice without charge, access to courts and recourse to law would be open to all.

The Academy's printed circular openly acknowledged that the subject for this contest had been 'conçu d'après l'Arrêt du Conseil d'État du Roi, portant établissement d'une administration provinciale dans le Berry', which had been issued scarcely a month earlier, and revealed, tantalizingly, that the money to fund the prize had been given to the Academy by 'une personne illustre, Membre honoraire de la Compagnie, dont le nom seul seroit un éloge, si elle n'avoit pas la modestie de vouloir rester inconnue, dans une circonstance qui ne pourroit qu'ajouter à sa gloire'. The circular also proclaimed the Academy's confident expectation that its latest contest question would provoke broad public interest throughout France for, although by its question the Academy was asking competitors to submit essays on the best way to administer Champagne (and, incidentally, complying with the spirit if not the letter of the regulations imposed on it by its own letters-patent which required the Academy to devote itself to the pursuit of matters 'utiles sur-tout dans la Province de Champagne'),⁶⁸ the subject itself

en intéressant la Province de Champagne, intéresse en même tems toute la France, puisqu'il a rapport à un événement qui annonce à tous les François un règne de bonheur, & qui déjà répand l'espérance & la joie dans tous les coeurs.⁶⁹

The Academy's confidence seems to have been based on its almost literal reading of Necker's preamble to the edict establishing the Berry Assembly, for the language in which it set its contest topic demonstrates the Academy's almost unquestioning acceptance of the political principles placed in Louis XVI's mouth by his Director-General of Finance: that the assembly was being established both to further the interests of his poorest subjects (the preamble stated that 'Sa Majesté recommande surtout aux

⁶⁸ 'Statuts et règlements' - XXIV.

⁶⁹ 'Prix proposés par l'Académie [...] dans son Assemblée publique du 25 Août 1778', p. 4.

membres de la nouvelle assemblée le sort du peuple et les intérêts des contribuables les moins aisés' -- the portion of the nation whose interests were of greatest concern to the Châlons Academy) and in response to a desire for administrative (and fiscal) reform 'depuis [...] longtemps l'objet des vœux de ses provinces'. The preamble also clearly indicated that the assembly being established in Berry was 'un essai d'administration' which could, if it functioned effectively, lead to the extension of similar assemblies to all the generalities in the pays d'élection: a possibility which, in the Academy's question, heralded 'un règne de bonheur' which was already lifting the hearts and hopes of all Frenchmen.⁷⁰

But the Academy's confidence that Necker's announcement of the experimental assembly in Berry -- and its own announcement of a competition to promote public discussion of its merits -- would be greeted with universal approval among all Frenchmen was unfounded. The issues raised by the Academy's announcements of this contest, like its contests on the corvée, legal and judicial reforms, and on popular education, served as a public, if informal, endorsement by this royal academy for the agenda of reforms currently being essayed by the Director General. By making these reforms the object of public discussion the Academy demonstrated that it shared Necker's confidence that, if allowed to express its views on reform, an enlightened public would grant the government its full support in its efforts to eliminate uneconomic and unjust privilege. But in this the Academy also showed how seriously it underestimated the extent of hostility to these reforms among the privileged. Not only would the Director-General himself encounter sustained opposition to this latest aspect of his

⁷⁰ For discussion of Necker's preamble to the edict of 12 July 1778 establishing the Berry Assembly see Gomel, Les Causes financières de la Révolution française, I, 414.

administrative and fiscal reforms; so, too, would the provincial academy so unwise as to bring such politically contentious issues before a citizenry otherwise excluded from public consideration of matters of state. The Academy's other questions had asked the public to discourse on, for example, the inadequacy of existing provisions for poor relief (and by implication, criticized the charitable institutions of the Church), on reforms to the way France's highways were built and funded (therefore, indirectly criticizing the injustices of the existing fiscal system), or insisted on the immorality of an educational system which condemned the poor to ignorance and economic dependence; but its competitions on legal and judicial reform and its contest question supporting Necker's moves to introduce a system of provincial administrative assemblies (in which property owners of the Third Estate would deliberate and vote on an equal footing with members of the First and Second Estates, assisting Crown Intendants in the assessment and collection of taxes and the administration of charitable assistance and the supervision of works projects like the corvée) were more than those opposed to these reforms were willing to tolerate from a minor provincial learned society which had clearly overestimated its academic brief.

VII

MINISTERIAL REACTION AND THE ACADEMY'S ESSAYS IN REFORM

Those in the government and outside it who were opposed to the reforms being introduced by Necker and, equally seriously, hostile to the whole idea of allowing public opinion to impinge on matters of state do not, at first, seem to have given much thought to the series of reformist questions which the Châlons Academy had first announced in 1778. But by 1780 the political dangers inherent in public discussion of these questions had become apparent to senior ministers who seem suddenly to have realized that the public profile of this fledgling provincial society and the political climate in which its questions were being considered had significantly altered since its first announcement of these questions two years earlier. The success of the Academy's first public essay competition and the two editions of those essays which it had published in its résumé had earned the Châlons society a national and even international reputation not only among those in learned bodies or philanthropic societies but among ministers and magistrates, among influential proponents of reform in the Church and at court as well as among local and provincial government administrators and officials and among ordinary members of the literate public. Considered in the context of Necker's open appeal to public opinion and of the opposition, both open and veiled, to the Director-General's fiscal, judicial and administrative reforms among powerful conservative elements in the Church, the nobility and the parlements, among financiers and some of the Crown's most senior ministers, the latest questions proposed by the Châlons Academy for public discussion in the

forum created by their annual essay contests could no longer be dismissed as a political irrelevance.

GOVERNMENT OPPOSITION

In early June of 1780, nearly two years after the Academy had published its first announcement of the prize essay competition on reforms to provincial administration and only weeks before it proposed to award its prize, the Academy received the following letter from the Foreign Minister Vergennes:

Vous avez proposé [...] un prix dont le sujet en partant de l'arrêt du Conseil portant établissement d'une administration provinciale en Berry, présente la question de savoir quels seroient les moyens les plus avantageux pour administrer la Champagne [...]. Comme ce sujet intéresse le Gouvernement d'une manière particulière, surtout dans les circonstances actuelles, vous n'auriez pas dû le proposer sans en avoir obtenu la permission du Roi. L'Intention de sa Majesté est qu'avant de distribuer le prix et de rendre public aucun des ouvrages qui vous seront remis, vous ayez soin de me les adresser.¹

The Academy's letter of response was immediate and clearly confident of the rightness of its cause, the procedure it had followed in announcing its question, and the expressed support the contest enjoyed from senior figures in government. After reminding Vergennes that the Academy had begun publicizing its questions in August of 1778 and repeated this process throughout 1779 and early 1780, having first sent him and other ministers printed copies of these announcements, the academicians informed Vergennes that the inspiration for its contest had come from 'une personne illustre qui aime et qui sert avec distinction l'État et le Roi' who, in suggesting the question, had also provided the Academy with the 600 livres to fund its prize. Without naming its benefactor,² the Academy continued:

¹ AD Marne I J 195 - letter dated 5 June 1780.

² The Academy refused to divulge the name of its benefactor to either Necker or Vergennes, although its correspondence with competitors reveals that at least one of them was in regular contact with the two Choiseuls and that, with the Academy's full knowledge, the cousins had been allowed to read several of the big treatises submitted for the contest well before the

Nous avons la Confiance, Monseigneur, que notre démarche n'a point été désapprouvée du ministre à qui nous avons eu l'honneur d'en faire part. Nous avons la reponse de M. Bertin qui nous donne à cette occasion des marques de bonté et M. Necker nous a écrit de sa propre main pour nous demander le nom de cette personne bienfaisante qui avoit envoyé le sujet du Prix, parce qu'il ne pouvoit que lui faire honneur. Ce sont, Monseigneur, les termes de la lettre.³

The Academy's intentions in proposing the question were, members assured the Foreign Minister, based on their devotion to the Crown.

Nous sommes trop bon serviteurs du Roi pour rien faire jamais qui puisse lui déplaire, et nous aimons trop l'Etat pour oser contredire aux sages principes qui le gouvernent.

At no point had the Academy attempted to circumvent ministerial attention. Indeed, even before they had received Vergennes's most recent letter, they had, they confided, written once more to Necker, an honorary member of the society, for his views on the matter.

Lorsque nous avons reçu la lettre dont vous nous avez honoré, déjà nous avons fait pressenter M. le Directeur Général sur le prix que nous pourrions être dans le cas d'adjuger dans notre assemblée publique du 25 août prochain.

Thus, although the Academy fully recognized the need for consultation with ministers and had, in this instance as always, kept the government informed of its activities, its members were confident that, if Vergennes would only allow them to pursue their assessment of the essays which they had received from the public on this matter, the Academy would soon be in a position to provide the government with information and ideas which could be useful to it as it considered how it could extend similar administrative assemblies

manuscripts were confiscated by the government. For the Duc de Choiseul's views on Necker's arrêt see his 'Réflexions sur l'Établissement d'États provinciaux en France' which the exiled minister claimed to have written only fifteen days after having heard about Necker's reform. This essay can be read in volume one (pp. 201-17) of the two-volume Mémoires de M. le Duc de Choiseul, ancien ministre de la Marine, de la Guerre, & des Affaires étrangères, écrits par lui-même, et imprimé à Chanteloup en 1778, published in Chanteloup and Paris chez Buisson in 1790.

³ AD Marne I J 195 - letter from the Academy to Vergennes dated 19 June 1780.

to other provinces in the realm: 'Nous vous supplions de nous permettre de continuer l'examen de nos mémoires. Nous ignorons encore s'il en est aucun que nous puissions couronner. Mais', they wrote confidently,

nous rejetterons tous ceux qui seroient plus capables d'échauffer que d'éclairer les esprits.

Buoyed up by the success of their first contests, by the reception given these by government ministers and the optimism this generated in the Crown's willingness to welcome the views of an enlightened citizenry -- as well as by a political naïveté possible only to those who had just made their entrance on the national stage, the Châlons Academy dared to suggest to one of Louis XVI's most senior ministers that it -- not he -- should be allowed to judge which, among the essays it received, might be useful to their sovereign: 'Si nous en découvrons quelqu'un qui soit également modeste et sage et qui nous paraisse pouvoir être utile, nous aurons l'honneur de vous l'envoyer, Monseigneur, avec tous les autres'. Such was the Academy's confidence that the minister would see reason and grant their request to judge their contest essays, that it contrived to use the occasion of this letter to invite the Foreign Minister to become an honorary member and patron of a body whose commitment to what might be useful to Crown and country was, it insisted, unswerving.

Nous osons espérer qu'après que vous en être fait rendre compte, vous daignerez être le Guide d'une compagnie qui n'a d'autre passion que de prouver son zèle à sa patrie et à son Roi. A l'Utilité telle est la devise qu'elle s'est choisie et elle a fait serment d'être toujours fidele. Puisse-t-elle se rendre digne de vos bontés par ses efforts.

Explaining that 'la retraite de M. Bertin qui étoit son Bienfaiteur l'a privée d'un puissant appui', the Academy presumed to flatter one who was no stranger to diplomacy: 'Puissions-nous bientôt y voir aussi le nom d'un

Ministre qui a montré à toute l'Europe que la politique ainsi que la guerre a ses héros'.⁴

Vergennes replied to their letter within the week; but, although he agreed that the Academy could send him its comments on the essays for this contest, he at the same time required it to send him forthwith every communication it had received on the subject. The minister's polite refusal of membership should have left the Châlons academicians in no doubt as to his view of both their motto and the appropriate focus of their activities:

La place que vous m'offrez parmi vous ne pourroit que me flatter infiniment; mais je vous avoue que je ne me crois pas dans le cas de l'occuper, n'ayant point été à porter de me livrer assez particulièrement à la Littérature.⁵

The Academy ignored Vergennes's refusal and elected him an honorary member of their society at their next meeting;⁶ but the memoirs on provincial administration which they had sent him were not, as they had hoped, returned to them in time for the Academy's annual public meeting of 25 August 1780.⁷ In that meeting the Academy announced the prize winners, J.-P. Brissot and Joseph Bernardi, for its other competition of that year

⁴ The assembled academicians agreed the terms of this letter on 19 June 1780. It was sent to Vergennes three days later and signed by Malvaux, Sabbathier, Beschefer, Delacourt, Camuset, Michel, Soleau, Delestrée and Richard. AD Marne I J 195.

⁵ AD Marne I J 195 - letter dated 30 June 1780. Emphasis added.

⁶ AD Marne I J 195 - proceedings for 19 July 1780.

⁷ The manuscripts were never returned to the Academy; however, it has been possible to piece together the veiled correspondence, most of it unsigned, surrounding this competition and to establish that at least five and possibly nine competitors submitted substantial studies for this contest. Although none of these exists in manuscript in Châlons, four complete 'essays' have been located -- three in printed form in the British Library, one in manuscript in Reims; a fifth essay survives only through the Academy's notes on it. The competitors who have been positively identified are Boncerf, LeTrosne, Clicquot de Blervache, and Grouber de Groubental. There is evidence that Brissot may also have intended to compete in this contest.

on the reform of France's penal laws; but without any word from Vergennes it was forced to remain silent about the competition on provincial administration and it was not until Vergennes's letter of 28 August reached Châlons in early September that the Academy was informed of the decision that 'l'intention de sa Majesté est que ce prix ne soit pas décerné et qu'il ne soit donné aucune publicité à ses mémoires'.

The Academy's correspondence in this period demonstrates how great was the distance separating this provincial learned society from events in Paris and Versailles.⁸ Apparently ignorant of the pressure being put on the Director General as a result of the concerted opposition of princes, parlement, financiers and other vested interests to the fiscal, administrative and judicial reforms he was introducing and which the Academy was championing through their contests, the Châlons society focused its attention on the fate of its contest essays and on the reputation of the Academy and the future of its essay competitions if, having realized that the society had failed to award its prize, the public came to believe that the Academy was careless of its trust.

⁸ The government's attention to the Academy's contest provides an indication of the importance it attached to the influence of the public contests of the provincial academies and of the degree to which it feared the publicity surrounding the Châlons contests might jeopardize its own position. The 'circonstances actuelles' to which Vergennes referred in his letter to the Academy would have included the publicity surrounding the edict of 19 March 1780, which had been issued to establish another assembly in the Bourbonnais at Moulins, and which had sparked defiant opposition from the Intendant of that province and from senior magistrates in Paris who saw the new assemblies as a blatant attempt by the government to reduce their powers, as well as the string of libellous brochures against Necker, his assemblies, and the reforms he had introduced or proposed to introduce in the General Farm and the finances of princely households which began to appear in Paris from April of that year. Necker had these pamphlets bought up to stop their circulation, but rumours were that the campaign enjoyed the support of highly placed figures. By the summer of 1780 -- and Vergennes's letter to the Academy -- commentators like the Abbé de Veri and Hardy believed that, although Necker still enjoyed the King's favour, his ministry was under threat. See Égret, Necker, pp. 163-67 and Harris, Necker, pp. 198-202.

Outraged by the Foreign Minister's treatment of the Academy, members drafted a letter to Necker on 6 September to inform him of Vergennes's action and to appeal to the author of the edict which had inspired their competition to recognize the public's interest in his experimental assemblies and defend the justice of their cause before their sovereign.

L'Académie de Chaalons-sur-Marne a l'honneur de vous envoyer le détail de sa séance publique. Elle n'a pas pu, Monsieur, répondre à la vive attente de toutes les Provinces. M. le Comte de Vergennes, à qui elle avoit eu l'honneur d'adresser ses principaux mémoires sur l'administration de la Champagne ne lui avoit point fait celui de lui répondre avant le jour de son assemblée et il vient de lui écrire que l'intention de sa Majesté étoit que le prix qu'elle auroit désiré pouvoir décerner sur cette matière ne le fût pas et qu'il ne fût donné aucune publicité à ces Mémoires. Nous avons la confiance, Monsieur, que vous voulez bien rendre justice à notre zèle. Nous sommes avec autant de reconnoissance que de respect, &c.⁹

If Necker replied to this letter, the response has not survived among the Academy's papers; but on the same day in which it wrote to the Finance Minister, the society, observing the usual academic courtesies, also wrote to Vergennes, the duc de Bourbon, and Rouillé d'Orfeuil sending each an account of the proceedings of its annual public meeting, announcing the winners of its competition on reforms to penal laws with extracts from the most outstanding of the essays, and giving the dates and details for its

⁹ AD Marne I J 195. Having received warning through another channel earlier in the year that there was some controversy over the content of one of the essays which had been submitted for the competition, Sabbathier had written to the Academy's contact in Necker's office, Michel-François Dailly, premier commis des finances, responsible for the département des impositions, who had been an associate member of the Châlons society since 1777. 28 May 1780 Dailly reported back to him that he had seen the work in question (it is not named but internal evidence would seem to indicate that he was referring to Le Trosne's two-volume De l'administration provinciale et l'impôt, which had been published in Basle and which Necker had at first allowed to circulate in France, but then had abandoned when its views on taxation of ecclesiastical land and appropriation of its property became known to powerful opponents of the Director General in the First Estate) and that it was not now circulating with the government's authorization. Dailly therefore warned his academic colleagues that they should exercise extreme caution in assessing the merit of a memoir which contained 'beaucoup de faits susceptibles de contradiction et des propositions que l'on peut croire hasardées'. AD Marne I J 208.

forthcoming competitions. D'Orfeuil and their protector responded with their usual praise,¹⁰ but Vergennes's terse reply bore an ominous warning:

Dans les mémoires auxquels vous serez dans le cas de donner votre suffrage, je ne puis trop vous recommander de circonspection pour tous ce qui peut intéresser le gouvernement.¹¹

There is evidence that, despite Vergennes's warning to the Academy to remain silent about the reasons for its failure to award its prize, some members of the public who had been tempted by the Academy's competition on provincial administration had learned of the government's intervention and were worried about the fate of the contest essays. Brissot wrote just days after the Academy's public meeting to inquire whether he had been mistaken in believing that it was the Châlons Academy which had invited the public to write on provincial assemblies;¹² and the Parisian lawyer, Grouber de Groubental, who had submitted a long treatise for the competition and been in close contact with its sponsor Choiseul, wrote repeatedly in September and October, reproaching the Academy's officers for failing to heed the warnings he had given them nearly eighteen months before. A letter in early October chided: 'l'Academie aurait du avant de

¹⁰ The duc de Bourbon's letter, written [6] September 1780, undoubtedly helped to persuade the Academy that it still enjoyed the confidence of the powerful: 'J'ay lu, Monsieur, avec la plus grande satisfaction le détail que vous m'avez envoyé de la dernière séance publique de l'académie de Chaalons: les extraits qu'il contenoit des mémoires couronnées m'ont prouvé que l'académie apportoit autant de discernement et de goût dans leur examen, que dans le choix des sujets qu'elle annonce pour prix. Soyez auprès d'elle l'interprète et de ma satisfaction et du désir sincère que j'ay de trouver des occasions de lui être utile.' AD Marne I J 47.

¹¹ AD Marne I J 195 - letter dated 27 September 1780.

¹² Brissot's letter provides an indication of the intense interest the Academy's contests were attracting among at least some sectors of the literate public. In a note dated 4 September 1780, that is only ten days after the Academy failed to announce its prize winner, Brissot asked ironically: 'Quelle Académie a proposé pour prix de détailler les effets des administrations provinciales? J'ai toujours cru que c'étoit la vôtre'. AD Marne I J 209.

se dessaisir des mémoires, arrêter son jugement sur ses registres, et rendre ensuite publiques les causes de la suppression du prix' adding 'cela est même d'autant plus important que la nation attendait avec impatience l'événement de ce prix intéressant'; the Academy's failure to give an explanation for their silence would, he predicted inspire 'de la défiance à ceux qui voudront concourir à ces prix académiques'.¹³ But without authorization, the Academy was powerless to provide any public explanation.

It could, however, get on with the preparations for publication of the collection of essays on reforms to penal laws which it had announced in its August meeting and with plans for future competitions. So, during the autumn and winter of 1780/81 the Academy conferred with Élie de Beaumont, the sponsor of its competitions for 1781 on the rights of the falsely accused and for 1782 on the plight of the labouring poor,¹⁴ while Malvaux, Sabbathier and Delacourt corresponded with those who had written the most outstanding essays for that competition, requesting that they modify some of the language of their essays so that the reforms they advocated would pass the government's censors.¹⁵ Sabbathier and Malvaux also made arrangements with the censor the Abbé Le Chevalier to distribute its new publication to senior magistrates in Paris and to others sympathetic to the reforms advocated in the collection once it was published.¹⁶ But Vergennes was slow in authorizing publication of the

¹³ AD Marne I J 208 - letter dated 2 October 1780. The lawyer could not resist reminding the Academy that it still had to answer to the competition's sponsor: 'Je ne sais comment Mgr de Choiseul prendra cela'.

¹⁴ AD Marne I J 195 - deliberations of 10 January 1781.

¹⁵ See AD Marne I J 209 and I J 47 for the Academy's correspondence with Brissot and Bernardi during the autumn of 1780 about modifications to their essays. The Academy invited Brissot to become an associate member of the society in recognition of the outstanding merit of his essay. AD Marne I J 195 - proceedings for 20 December 1780.

¹⁶ AD Marne I J 208 - letter dated 30 November 1780.

Academy's résumé on reforms to penal laws and so the Academy was, once more, forced to proceed without any assurance that it would be permitted to fulfil its obligations to its competitors and the public to whom it had announced its forthcoming publication.¹⁷

Unknown to the Academy the Foreign Minister had in September 1780 consulted with the Keeper of the Seals about the Châlons Academy's contests; and although Miromesnil at that time saw little harm in the Academy's competitions and did nothing to block its contest for 1781 on the rights of the falsely accused, the Foreign Minister continued to take particular interest in the Academy's activities.¹⁸ Events in Paris added to his concerns. In February 1781 Necker published his Compte rendu, which made the Crown's finances a matter of public discussion. The work was enormously successful, selling 3,000 copies the first day and perhaps 10,000 a week thereafter. Meanwhile, those opposed to the Director General in April published the secret memoir he had prepared in 1778 for Louis XVI on the work and purpose of provincial assemblies in order to win the King's support for their introduction. In this document Necker had been openly critical of the parlements and intendants; he had also acknowledged -- as

¹⁷ Permission to proceed with publication of an expurgated version of the essays it had received for this contest was extremely slow in coming and during the delay the Academy's relations with its competitors were strained. Despite its 1781 publication date, Les Moyens d'Adoucir la Rigueur des Lois Pénales en France, sans nuire à la sûreté publique ou Discours couronnés par l'Académie de Châlons-sur-Marne en 1780, suivis de celui qui a obtenu l'accessit, & des extraits de quelques autres Mémoires présentés à la même Académie (Châlons-sur-Marne, Seneuze, 1781) does not seem to have been available in Paris until sometime the summer of 1782 when we find the first references to its reception there. 12 July 1782 Bernardi wrote Sabbathier: 'Monsieur, on vient de m'écrire de Paris que le gouvernement a enfin permis la publication des ouvrages sur la justice criminelle que votre académie avoit couronnés en 1780'. AD Marne I J 47.

¹⁸ Archives Nationales V¹ - 669 - Registre chancellerie. Année 1780 - 24 sept - Conseil des ministres fol. C 39 contains Miromesnil's advise to Vergennes. I am grateful to Dr David Jacobson for having alerted me to this and other entries in the chancellory archives.

he had in the Compte rendu -- the role that enlightened public opinion could play in enabling ministers to overcome the opposition of vested interests to reform. Pressure against the Director General arose on every side. Vergennes, who was worried by Necker's increasing appeal to the power of public opinion and concerned lest it be allowed to undermine the stability of the monarchy, added his voice to those critical of the reforming minister. On 19 May 1781 Necker resigned. The political climate in which the Châlons Academy attempted to hold and judge its public essay contests had in these months altered dramatically.¹⁹

Necker had fallen from power before the Academy's next séance publique. On 25 August 1781 it planned to announce the winners of its competitions on popular education and on the rights of the falsely accused, but early that month the Academy received another letter from Vergennes which once again placed the Academy's competitions in serious jeopardy. Although his letter is missing from the Academy's archives, its official register records that on hearing it read the assembled members immediately voted to send Malvaux and Sabbathier to 'aller à la cour faire au nom de l'académie des représentations au ministre', acting with 'le plus de diligence possible afin d'être de retour avant la St Louis'.²⁰ In Versailles the pair were seen by both Vergennes and Miromesnil who, when informed by Vergennes in early August of the Academy's impending announcement of its prizes, had written to the Foreign Minister expressing his fear that if the government were to allow royal academies to propose

¹⁹ For an account of the publications and events surrounding the end of Necker's first ministry see Soulavie, Mémoires historiques, IV, 155 and 159, Égret, Necker, pp. 163-78; Harris, Necker, pp. 176-241, L. de Lavergne, 'Les Assemblées provinciales en France avant 1789', pp. 36-66 and 392-428, Gomel, Les Causes financières, pp. 410-20, and Baker, Inventing the French Revolution, pp. 191-92.

²⁰ AD Marne I J 195 - proceedings of the meeting of 16 August 1781.

such questions for publication, the ensuing competitions would result in what Miromesnil described as 'l'inconvenient de faire renaître des disputes', adding, about the Academy's competition on judicial reform, that the government was asking for trouble 'si les Académies traitent cet objet'.²¹

Malvaux and Sabbathier returned to Châlons in time for the public meeting of 25 August and although their account of the visit to Versailles is not, significantly, recorded in the Academy's minutes of its private proceedings, it seems that the ministers in the end permitted the Academy to award its prizes but gave them strict warnings about future contests and indicated that the Academy would no longer be allowed to 'imprimer, ni couronner sans une censure préalable'.²² According to Brissot, who won the prize on the rights of the falsely accused and who had already been forced to censor his previous winning essay for the Academy before it could be published,

le garde des sceaux [...] Miromesnil [...] n'avoit vu qu'avec effroi une Académie de province proposer des prix sur des abus qui tenaient aussi près du despotisme et couronner des discours aussi propres à tirer les esprits de leur léthargie.²³

²¹ Archives Nationales V¹ 670 - Registre chancellerie année 1781. Miromesnil's memo is dated 5 August 1781.

²² According to Brissot, writing some years after the event, Miromesnil and Vergennes took action against the Châlons Academy not only because of their own apprehension about the influence of its contests on public opinion but also because of opposition to the Academy in parlement and at court itself. Brissot's information about the outcome of the Academy's trip to Versailles probably came through Delacourt, who was the academician who was most active in promoting the competition on reforms to France's penal laws and who had been in close contact with Brissot about that contest. See AD Marne I J 209 - letters from Brissot to the Academy dated 29 August, 4 September, and 20 November 1781 and Claude Perroud, ed, J.-P. Brissot: Correspondance et Papiers, I, 283.

²³ Brissot, Mémoires, 1754-1793, edited by Cl. Perroud, II, 233-34. Brissot shared the prize with Philippon de la Madeleine and Poupignon, lawyers in the bureau des finances at Besançon and Dijon.

Goyon d'Arzac won the prize on the provision of education for the popular classes. Within nine months he, too, would be writing to

The Academy quietly refused to alter its plans for the competition on reforms to France's civil laws and judicial procedure but word had already begun to spread about the government's censorship of its contests. Within days the Academy received a letter from Petion de Villeneuve, who had prepared an essay for the 1782 competition:

Je viens d'apprendre une nouvelle affligeante et que j'ai de la peine à croire. Est-il vrai que le ministre des affaires étrangères ait défendu de donner le prix que votre académie a proposé pour la réforme des loix civiles et de la procédure en France. Il n'y a qu'un moment que le gouvernement paroissait désirer cette réforme intéressante: tout change à la vérité très promptement à la cour. Si la nouvelle est certaine, je vous prie de vouloir bien avoir la complaisance de me le marquer.²⁴

This would be the first of many such letters the Academy would receive; and although it would be sent at least a dozen essays for its 1782 competition on judicial reform, government censorship had clearly reduced the number of those who might otherwise have considered competing in this contest. The Academy went ahead with its competition and with the more numerically successful competition on the plight of the labouring poor, which in any case, attracted essays from those outside the legal professions who seem to have had little idea of the government's action against the Academy. But the essays from neither competition were to be published under the Academy's auspices.

In January and again in July of 1782 Vergennes wrote to Miromesnil about the contests of the Châlons Academy; and this time the

Sabbathier to complain about the Academy's failure to publish his winning essay: 'Vous ne me dites rien de l'impression du Plan d'Education pour le Peuple. Auroit-elle encore éprouvé des difficultés ministérielles?'. AD Marne I J 49 - letter dated 19 June 1782. By October of 1783 he was asking Sabbathier to return the several memoirs he had submitted to Academy, most especially the one on popular education, which he hoped to publish himself: 'Je vais ... essayer de le tirer de l'oublie auquel ... Votre compagnie semble avoir condamné et mon nom et mes ouvrages'. Ibid - letter dated 12 October 1783.

²⁴ AD Marne I J 47 - letter dated 1 September 1781.

Chancellor confirmed the Foreign Minister's conviction that Crown academies should be prevented from treating matters of either Church or State. A memo dated 25 July 1782 instructed a secretary to:

Repondre à M. de Vergennes que l'on pense qu'il est très intéressant de ne point souffrir que les académies traitent rien de ce qui intéresse la Religion, la politique, la législation et le gouvernement.²⁵

These instructions did not alter the Crown's previous official policy with regard to its royal academies; but they did dramatically alter the practice and perceived role of its academicians in Châlons. Although Vergennes had informed the Châlons academicians a year earlier that they were to proceed only with their competition question on how to improve the plight of the labouring poor, the Academy had not only gone ahead with its competition on judicial reform, but its competition had generated essays which were highly critical of the whole system of justice in France; those essayists who did compete had, for the most part once again, been legal professionals and they had used their contest essays to condemn all judges and jurisdictions which diminished the power and authority of the Crown and were scathing in their criticism of seigneurial judges and jurisdictions and the venality of judicial office which both diluted the sovereignty of the Crown in judicial matters and removed recourse to justice beyond the means of the majority of Frenchmen. That justice in France was the preserve of privilege and that her laws and legal institutions were 'faites par les riches, maintenues, interprétées par eux' and thus 'elles oppriment les pauvres, c'est à dire, la majeure partie de la Nation' were consistent themes in the essays which reached the Academy for this competition.²⁶

²⁵ Archives Nationales V¹ 670 - Registre chancellerie année 1781.

²⁶ The quotation is taken from the essay written by Petion de Villeneuve which, after the contest was suppressed, he published in London in 1782.

And although they clearly reflected the direction and tenor of reforms implied in the Academy's original announcements of its question -- and advocated in its first published book, the government could not allow such views to be made known through a royal academy.²⁷

Because of the government's intervention in this contest, the Academy postponed announcement of its prize winners for 1782 on either reforms to civil justice or measures to improve the plight of the labouring poor;²⁸ but it soon realized that it had little hope of reaching a larger public with the reformist views of these competitors. 30 August 1782 Vergennes wrote to the Academy condemning it for its failure to retract its announcement of this competition.

Messieurs,

D'après l'intention du Roi que je vous avais fait connoître, vous ne deviez pas vous contenter de ne point renouveler en 1781 l'annonce du prix ayant pour sujet, les moyens de rendre la justice en France avec le plus de célérité et le moins de frais possible. Vous auriez dû changer ce sujet et annoncer ce changement; mais persuadé de votre soumission et de la pureté de vos vûes, sa Majesté veut bien vous donner une marque particulière de sa bonté en vous

²⁷ Archives Nationales V1 671 - Registre chancellerie année 1782.

²⁸ Its decision about the fate of the essays submitted for its competition on reforms to the administration of justice was not made until the following year. On 20 August 1783 the judging academicians recommended to the society the names of those whom they believed should be awarded the prize and honorable mention for this contest; but no formal announcement was made in the annual public meeting five days later. The winner was L.-J.-B. Bucquet, procureur du roi in the présidial court of Beauvais and a known proponent of radical reforms to the judiciary; the runner-up the Paris lawyer Falour Duvergier. The Academy's comment on Bucquet's essay reveals something of its mood in the face of the ministry's continued refusal to allow it to operate freely: 'en couronnant le mémoire nous rendons justice au zèle et aux lumières d'un bon citoyen, mais nous ne pouvons nous flatter de voir opérer les réformes qu'il propose'. AD Marne I J 49. The same year that he won the Academy's prize Bucquet and two other procureurs were chosen by members of one hundred royal présidials to present their views 'sur l'état de la justice et de la magistrature dans les provinces' before the King.

Although the Academy gave the number of the best essay for its competition on the labouring poor, which had been written by Clicquot de Blervache, it at the same time voted to allow competitors to remain anonymous, if they so wished. AD Marne I J 195 - proceedings for 25 August 1783.

permettant de distribuer le prix sur les mémoires qui vous ont été adressés, à condition que vous me le ferez passer incessamment, sans leur donner d'autre publicité que la lecture qui pourra être faite à votre assemblée des meilleurs morceaux qui ne contiendront rien de dangereux.²⁹

With this letter the Academy's power to command a national and even an international audience for its reformist contest essays shrank to the interior of a single room in the Châlons hôtel de ville. Although some of its most ambitious and politically astute competitors would publish their essays elsewhere, the Academy was henceforth prevented from working directly to promote public discussion of any reform issue impinging on fiscal, judicial or administrative matters and its former competitors were reduced to writing bitter letters to complain about its failure to withstand the ministries' opposition. Referring to the Academy's competition on judicial reform a Paris lawyer called Lagasse, who had competed in that contest wrote:

Je vous serai infiniment obligé, Monsieur, de vouloir bien me dire si effectivement M^{rs} de l'académie l'ont abandonné ou s'ils n'ont fait que suspendre leur jugements jusqu'au tems que la question soit traitée d'une manière satisfaisante, ce qui ne sera pas aisé en supposant que l'on exige que l'on y concilie l'avantage du peuple avec les usages reçus qui sont tous à l'avantage des fiers, des grands et des propriétaires dont la plupart sont en opposition avec le bonheur de la classe du peuple la plus indigente.³⁰

Also from Paris from Lottin, the Academy's contact with Linguet:

De bons patriotes qui se sont occupés une année à traiter un sujet utile, important, qu'ils ayent, ou même qu'ils n'ayent eu aucun succès, désirent au moins savoir leur sort: C'est donc une justice à leur rendre qui leur est bien due ... autrement vous commettez une injustice réelle et vous enlevez gratuitement à des gens de lettres estimables, laborieux patriotes la récompense la plus légitime & la plus flatteuse de leur travail.³¹

²⁹ Vergennes's letter of 30 August 1782 was transcribed in the Academy's register - AD Marne I J 195.

³⁰ AD Marne I J 48.

³¹ AD Marne I J 51 - letters of 30 September and 6 November 1784.

From Goyon d'Arzac, who had won the Academy's competition on popular education and competed in its third contest on judicial reform and would compete on the competition on the labouring poor, poured a litany of letters, which step by step conveyed the fear, fury and disgust of many of those who had written for the Academy's contests. In June of 1782:

Il est bien tems, après deux ans de publication dans tous les papiers publiques, de rejeter un sujet, quand les écrivains de la Nation s'en sont serieusement occupés. [...] est-il possible que l'autocratie Russe et la despotisme prussien nous donnent des leçons de patriotisme et de popularité et nous les donnent inutilement?

In October of that year:

les incertitudes que vos précédents m'avoient annoncées et le silence de la Gazette de France sur ce sujet m'avoient persuadé que le Gouvernement avait fini par faire supprimer une question dans les circonstances surtout où se trouvent, depuis quelques années, la magistrature et les tribunaux.

And in October of 1783:

Ce serait à peu près perdre mon tems que de m'occuper d'avantage à traiter des sujets donnés par votre compagnie en matière politique et d'administration. Le mérite de dire la vérité et de la dire avec courage obtient rarement des couronnes; c'est beaucoup s'il n'expose pas à des tracasseries.³²

This competitor, like many others who had in good faith submitted essays for the Academy's contests wrote to Sabbathier asking him to return their memoirs before they fell into ministerial hands. Still others wrote to ridicule the society for having attempted to do through their contests what even Necker had been unable to achieve. Honoré Fabre who had competed in the Academy's competition on what could be done to improve the plight of the labouring poor complained:

M. Necker y travailloit. Ses opérations ont été mises en suspens: vous désirez, messieurs, le remplacer par bonté et suppléer en son absence, ce qui me paroît difficile ... j'ignore, messieurs, s'il vous sera possible de parvenir à ce que M. Necker n'a pu.

³² AD Marne I J 49 - letters of 19 June and 25 October 1782 and 12 October 1783.

And although the Academy seemed determined to hold its prize for the competition on the labouring poor until 1783, Fabre declined to add anything to his existing memoir for that contest 'dans la crainte qu'il ne m'en mésarrive'. And in future, he gave notice, the Academy would not be receiving his views on reform which although 'très faciles' were evidently 'dangereux pour l'honnête homme qui les mettra à jour'.³³

Other competitors lashed out at the injustice and irresponsibility of the Academy in failing to inform its competitors of the fate of their essays.

A rural priest from Anjou, Pauvert, wrote in January of 1783:

Permettez[-moi] de vous demander, Monsieur, pourquoi les papiers publics n'ont rien dit du prix [...]: Quel sont les moyens d'améliorer en France la condition des laboureurs [...]? Si le Mémoires que l'on vous a envoyés ne méritoient pas le prix proposé? S'ils ne méritoient pas même d'accessit? encore faut-il avouer, qu'ils ont néanmoins coûté à leurs auteurs, des efforts et des réflexions, desquels, l'académie ne laissant pas de pouvoir profiter, méritoient au moins, ce semble, quelque réponse consolante ... ou même instructive sur leurs travaux? C'est un genre de salaire, qui me paroît légitime. Les académies, en seroient-elles quitte, Monsieur, après avoir proposé des questions, pour recevoir des Mémoires, tout gratuitement?

And, not content with haranguing Sabbathier for the Academy's failure to announce its prize, this parish priest also offered the Academy a lesson in political realism.

Cette interrogation que j'ose vous faire aujourd'hui me ramène, comme malgré moi, à la question que vous proposâtes l'an dernier. Et toutes réflexions faites: cette question intéressante étoit-elle bien du ressort d'une académie littéraire?

Les solutions, quelles qu'elle puissent être ne dependoient-elles point du Gouvernement? de différens Bureaux? et surtout peut-être du Bureau des finances (où les académies et les auteurs n'ont gueres d'accès).

Trouverois-je, dans cette difficulté, le mistere de votre silence, sur les mémoires envoyés, l'an dernier, à votre académie, et sans réponse?

Quoiqu'il en soit: après y avoir bien réfléchi, je crois qu'en France, cet obstacle est inséparable de la question et avant

³³ AD Marne I J 49 - letter of 2 December 1782. Of the other contests the Academy had announced, Fabre added: 'Je vous prie de m'excuser [...] si je garde le silence pour l'un et l'autre objet. Je laisse à d'autres cette hardiesse.'

de la proposer: l'Académie de Châlons auroit-elle procédé plus naturellement en établissant la question en ces termes? Quels sont les moyens de faire adopter au Gouvernement l'amélioration de la condition des laboureurs.³⁴

Even some of the Academy's own members despaired that their society would be allowed ever to justify their proud beginnings or to honour the Academy's devise A l'Utilité. Sabbathier wrote to Malvaux in Paris imploring him for advice 'dans ces circonstances critiques'. In the Academy's latest, poorly attended meeting, he reported,

quelques uns de nos confrères ont observé que depuis longtemps aucun de nos membres n'avoit produit de mémoires utiles ... capables de nous mériter dans le moment actuel encore moins dans la postérité la considération qui seul peut flatter une académie fondée sous les plus heureux auspices. Ils ont ajouté que inutilement nous choissions pour le sujet de nos prix les objets le plus brillans et le plus utiles, qu'en vain nous décernons nos couronnes académiques avec l'appareil le plus imposant. Toute cette pompe n'est qu'une représentation chimérique qui n'opère rien [...].³⁵

THE ACADEMY'S RESPONSE AND THE YEARS TO REVOLUTION

Despite the government's attempts to censor and silence the Academy, a decline in attendance at its meetings and in the number of participants in its contests, and the ridicule, complaints or whispered fears of a number of its former competitors, a hard core of Châlons academicians -- especially Malvaux and Sabbathier -- continued quietly to pursue the role they believed that Louis XVI had authorized them to undertake in

³⁴ AD Marne I J 51 - letter dated 27 January 1783. Pauvert goes on to ask rhetorically: 'Serois-je présomptueux (moi, simple particulier isolé) de représenter à votre académie que la question qu'elle propose en 1783, pourroit également être reformée, conformément à ma reflexion, et demander: 'Quels sont les moyens de faire adopter au gouvernement une amélioration à l'éducation des collèges?' And like others before him, Pauvert warns Sabbathier of the Academy's fate if it persisted in refusing to explain its reason for not awarding its prizes: 'votre silence [...] détermine le plus ou le moins de memoires que vous recevrez'.

³⁵ AD Marne I J 210 - seance of 4 March 1784.

granting their Academy its letters patent. And in so doing the political education of the Châlons academicians entered a crucial phase.

Ignoring government orders, academicians sent extracts of the best contest essays to Parisian and foreign papers³⁶ and exploited all the connections available to them to get the views expressed in their earlier contests before those who in the current repressive political climate still favoured reform; they used other, more establishment figures, to persuade recalcitrant ministers to authorize new contest questions and to lift their prohibition against publication of earlier contest essays. This required the concerted intervention of two of the Academy's most powerful allies, Rouillé d'Orfeuil and the Archbishop of Paris Leclerc de Juigné, as well as the covert support of sympathetic honorary and associate members in Paris.

The Academy's lobbying of the powerful began almost as soon as Vergennes had taken action to prevent the Academy from awarding its prizes for 1782. Accepting that for the moment the society would only be allowed to announce questions which had obtained the Foreign Minister's explicit approval, Malvaux and Sabbathier approached the Archbishop and the Intendant to speak to Vergennes and Miromesnil on the Academy's behalf about a question that touched only very slightly on measures likely to evoke protest from the powerful. And although the question that Vergennes eventually allowed the Academy to pose for 1783 on 'les moyens d'encourager et de perfectionner l'éducation des collèges' provoked essays which referred openly and approvingly to the Crown's action against moribund or

³⁶ AD Marne I J 209 - in a letter from Paté to Sabbathier, dated 4 December 1783, the Parisian reported that he had, as requested, sent extracts from the Academy's contest essays 'au Mercure, au journal de Paris, au journal de Savans et au journal de M. de la Blancherie', adding: Voilà les papiers publics les plus répandus. j'en ai aussi envoié au journal de fréron.'

suppressed religious orders in the sixties and drew on the parlements' sometimes controversial discussions of reforms to the collèges in that same period, the issues involved were not new and appeared to ministers to fall more appropriately within the purview of an academy than the Châlons society's previous questions on administration or judicial matters or indeed its competition on education for the popular classes. In December of 1782 the Academy was informed that Vergennes would allow it to propose a prize essay competition on reforms to the collèges; but members knew that this concession had been granted only after Rouillé d'Orfeuil had written to Vergennes strongly endorsing the Academy's request and the Archbishop's older brother, the Marquis de Juigné, former French ambassador to Russia and honorary member of the Châlons society, had intervened with Miromesnil to support this request.³⁷ Moreover, the letter Vergennes sent to the Academy announcing his decision left it little reason to believe that he intended it to do anything more than limit its discussion to matters he considered quite literally academic:

Cette matière, quoique très importante, ne me paroît si étrangère aux discussions académiques que les autres objets d'administration.³⁸

But Vergennes refused to allow even this set of competition questions to be published, and so Malvaux and Sabbathier set about finding other ways to circumvent the minister.

Malvaux's most powerful contact was the Archbishop and he repeatedly used his influence as his Vicar General to petition Vergennes to restore

³⁷ D'Orfeuil's letter to Vergennes of 23 November 1782 is transcribed in AD Marne I J 195. News of the Marquis de Juigné's intervention on the Academy's behalf with Vergennes and Miromesnil is recorded in a letter Malvaux wrote to Sabbathier 27 December 1782 in AD Marne I J 209.

³⁸ The transcript of Vergennes's letter of 20 November 1782 to the Intendant is included in the Academy's proceedings for 15 December 1782 - AD Marne I J 195.

the Academy's publishing privilege.³⁹ Meanwhile, he privately agreed with Sabbathier and a few other insiders in the Academy to supervise the preparation of résumés of the essays the Academy had received for all its competitions but for that on provincial administration (since the government's confiscation of even the notes the Academy had made on the long treatises submitted to it for its contest on the introduction of provincial assemblies prevented the faithful abbé from producing even a summary of those essays). A letter he wrote to Sabbathier in March of 1783 allows us to glimpse the importance of his continuing work for the Academy and reveals both his devotion to the Châlons society and its permanent secretary and his unfailing optimism that the reformist opinions expressed in its contest essays would one day be welcomed by Louis XVI, if only the Academy were able to present them to their sovereign. 'Je prépare les choses de mon mieux', he wrote Sabbathier encouragingly.

Je compte [...] reporter à la St Louis les résumés des corvées, de l'éducation du peuple et du dédommagement que l'on doit à un citoyen reconnu innocent... Je trouve ici des ressources et les 3 ouvrages s'il plaît à Dieu seront en état d'être imprimés [...]. J'ai l'espérance que le gouvernement fera lever la défense qui nous a été faite. Alors, Monsieur et cher confrère, vous viendrez faire une course à Paris et nous irons présenter à la fois à sa Majesté nos cinq ouvrages 1° la 3^e édition de la mendicité... 2° les corvées, 3° l'éducation du peuple, 4° la réforme des loix pénales, 5° le dédommagement que l'on doit à un citoyen reconnu innocent. Ce sera une occasion des plus belles pour l'académie.

But conscious that the Academy's activities were still being closely observed the cleric added, 'ne parlez à âme qui vive, je vous prie, des projets que je vous dévoile'.⁴⁰

When the government persisted in withholding the Academy's publishing privilege, Malvaux and Sabbathier sought out other avenues for getting the

³⁹ Malvaux reported on his efforts to persuade the government to lift its prohibition in letters to Sabbathier dated 3 March 1783 and 25 April 1784 - AD Marne I J 209 and 210.

⁴⁰ AD Marne I J 209 - letter of 3 March 1783.

contest essays to those who could make use of them. Sabbathier, who believed that Calonne might be sympathetic to the Academy and lift Vergennes's ban against publication of its essays, evidently approached the Controller-General directly with a request to publish some of the contest essays;⁴¹ but Malvaux, who was more accustomed to the wary politicking of court and Paris, reminded him: 'vous savez les précautions qu'il est nécessaire de prendre', and offered once again to intervene himself: 'si je puis être utile à l'Académie pour cet objet, vous savez que mon coeur lui est entièrement dévoué'. In this same letter Malvaux informed Sabbathier that he had learned that their associate, Élie de Beaumont, who had provided the money for the competition on the falsely accused, might be willing to prepare a résumé of the best of the essays the Academy had

⁴¹ AD Marne I J 210 - letter of 25 April 1784. It is possible that Sabbathier was attempting to gain authorization for publication of the essays the Academy had received on reform of the corvée and that the approach had been made following Calonne's recent increase in grants for roads and canal building.

As the Academy's perpetual secretary Sabbathier used every opportunity (New Years greetings, contest announcements, accounts of the society's public meetings) to write to the Academy's honorary members, assiduously cultivating those whom he thought might be useful to the society. See AD Marne I J 209 - letters of 7 September and 9 November 1782 from the first president of the Bordeaux parlement Le Berthon, who wrote in reply to letters from Sabbathier, the first thanking him for what must have been an account of the essays the Academy had received on the plight of the labouring poor, the second for having sent him the État actuel de l'Académie de Chaalons and answering a query about a correspondent from a lawyer from Bordeaux who had asked to become a member of the society. A letter to Sabbathier from Montlinot, dated 24 July 1784, indicates that the director of the Soissons dépôt maintained respectful relations with the academicians who had praised his views on the poor in its first published résumé. It also indicates that the two men had lately seen each other 'chez M. de Condorcet' and that Montlinot expressed his 'hommage' for the Châlonnais and the Academy by sending 'deux exemplaires de notre dernier compte un pour vous et l'autre pour votre académie'; he also asks the secretary if Malvaux were in Châlons. AD Marne I J 210.

received on that subject. Sabbathier approved the project and the essays were sent to him.⁴²

Throughout this period, when the Academy continued to pose contest topics approved by the ministry and to receive only a handful of essays worthy of their subject, Malvaux encouraged his colleagues to spend this period of enforced silence preparing for the day when the various constellations of power at court and in Paris would change again and the Academy would be allowed to put forward résumés it had drafted while waiting.⁴³ By March 1785 he had prepared the ground for yet another approach to Élie de Beaumont, who had also funded the Academy's prizes for its contests on the plight of the labouring poor. Malvaux was persuaded that this skilled lawyer and associate member of the Academy was willing to become the spokesmen for the country's labouring poor, too, by producing a résumé drawn from the essays the Academy had received on this subject which would contain 'ce qu'il y a de plus intéressant pour le public' and which could then be published 'sous les auspices de l'académie'.⁴⁴ Yet,

⁴² AD Marne I J 210 - letters of 9 and 25 April and 11 May 1784. In his letter to Sabbathier Malvaux confessed that he found the résumé of the essays on the rights of the falsely accused which he was supervising both 'faible et insuffisant' and suggested that the Academy's and public's interests would be better served by Élie de Beaumont's professional handling of the subject.

⁴³ AD Marne I J 210 - letter of 25 April 1784. Elie de Beaumont was asked and accepted to undertake résumés of the competition essays for the two sets of contest essays whose prize he had funded. Meanwhile in Châlons academicians there were at work compiling résumés of the other contest essays. Although Malvaux had originally planned to produce the résumé on popular education himself, he deferred to Parvillez, arranging with Sabbathier to return the memoirs to Châlons for that purpose. AD Marne I J 209 - 27 December 1782. Parvillez also collaborated with the curés Roussel and Camuset on a résumé of the essays received on reforms to education in the collège and Malvaux suggested that the Academy might ask the former intendant of Cayenne, Morisse, to produce a résumé of the essays from the corvée competition. AD Marne I J 195 - proceedings for 3 December 1784 and 9 March 1785.

⁴⁴ AD Marne I J 195 - proceedings for 9 March 1785.

despite Malvaux's standing in the Academy, members hesitated because of Vergennes's strict prohibitions against all publication. 'M. le Directeur a lu des lettres du Ministre par lesquelles il est défendu à l'académie de donner aucune publicité aux mémoire du dit prix, ainsi qu'à ceux de quelques autres Prix proposés par la Compagnie. Néanmoins', its minutes continue defiantly, 'comme les dites mémoires renferment des vues utiles et intéressantes pour le Public' the Academy voted to endorse Malvaux's suggestion, sending him the contest memoirs but with the request that he once more undertake to 'faire les démarches convenables auprès du Ministre pour l'engager à lever la défense qu'il a faite à l'Académie'.⁴⁵

By July of 1785 Malvaux had discovered yet another avenue of access to those with the power to use the Academy's contest essays to contribute towards the movement for reform. For this he exploited his insider's knowledge of the agenda of the forthcoming Assembly General of the Clergy and drew upon the sympathy of his own immediate superior Leclerc de Juigné, the Academy's former président né and Châlons's former bishop now Archbishop of Paris, and the good will of the abbé de Boulogne, titular member of the society who was to deliver the opening sermon of the Paris Assembly. The Academy's minutes record that during a visit to Châlons Malvaux had spoken privately with the society's officers and several other members of the society with news that

M. L'Archévêque de Paris et l'assemblée générale du clergé s'occupoient de trois objets importants, l'Education du Peuple, celle des femmes et celle des collèges et qu'il étoit chargé de la part de son dit archévêque de Paris et de la dite Assemblée générale du Clergé de demander à l'Académie les mémoires qu'elle avoit reçus sur chacun de ces trois objets, lorsqu'elle les avoit proposés, pour sujets de ses prix.

⁴⁵ Malvaux's letter is transcribed in the Academy's proceedings for 9 March 1785 - AD Marne I J 195.

Believing, for the first time in years, that it had at last regained access to one of the powerful bodies whose will guarded the gates of reform, members agreed 'd'une voie unanime' to 's'empress[er] de concourir aux vues de M. l'Archévêque de Paris et de l'Assemblée Générale du Clergé, leur communiquer [...] tous les mémoires qui lui avoient été adressés sur chacun de trois objets' through the good offices of Malvaux.⁴⁶ And, emboldened by this renewed recognition of the value of their contest essays, the Academy in this same meeting voted to comply with Malvaux's other suggestion and send Élie de Beaumont 'une copie des mémoires sur l'amélioration du sort des habitants de la campagne'.⁴⁷

In the years of waiting the Academy used their essay competitions to ask a series of questions whose political significance was less obvious. But although the numbers competing in its contests seriously declined and the profile of competitors reverted to the non-professional pattern which had emerged in its more general contests on the begging and labouring poor, the essays written in response to its questions -- for 1785 it asked how to relieve the shortage of wood, for 1786 how to facilitate and encourage marriages in France, for 1787 how to promote patriotism in a monarchy, for 1788 how to promote rural industry, particularly the production and finishing of flax, and for 1789 how to stem the tide of rural emigration -- provoked essays that over and over again reiterated the themes which had

⁴⁶ AD Marne I J 195 - proceedings for 20 July 1785. For discussion of the failure of the Assembly of the Clergy to pursue this reform in the face of other, more pressing temporal issues facing the clergy in this period, see Louis S. Greenbaum, Talleyrand, Statesman-Priest: The Agent-General of the Clergy and the Church of France at the end of the Old regime (Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 1970), pp. 139-40 and 154-56.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

dominated its contests before censorship.⁴⁸ France was, according to these isolated and very often politically insignificant essayists, a country dividing sharply against itself into rich and poor, privileged and unprivileged; and the solutions to the problems on which the Academy's contests focused could only be resolved if the Crown intervened to reform France's laws and the institutionalized practices which reduced the labouring classes to misery and suffering, which denied their most basic physical needs and the most basic human rights of civil society.

And although the Academy was not allowed to print these essays under its own aegis, some of these essays and many of those written for the Academy's earlier competitions were published, often anonymously or abroad, by their authors. Their circulation and reviews of them in the press would seem to indicate that despite the government's efforts to curtail the influence of this academy, reform ideas which had been formulated in response to questions it had posed were continuing to reach the public and, presumably, adding to public discussion -- or least, public consideration -- of reform issues.

Those trained in the legal professions were the most successful and persistent in getting their essays into print. Although the Academy eventually gained Vergennes's approval for the publication of extracts of the essays it received for its competition of 1780 on reforms to France's

⁴⁸ An additional question on how to encourage commerce in Châlons and in Champagne, which was posed year after year from 1782 on, provoked so little public interest that the Academy was never able to attract sufficient essays to consider awarding its prize. The essays (or the judging academicians' summaries of them) which survive from these contests can be read in AD Marne I J 52, 53, 54 and 55. The Academy's final competition for 1790, 'Quels sont les moyens de mettre en culture la plus avantageuse les terrains incultes, secs et arides de la Champagne' was won by Boncerf with an essay which was published, circulated in the districts in Paris, and eventually sent to the National Assembly, adding important impetus to discussions in that body which would lead to the creation of the Comité de Mendicité. See below.

criminal laws, both Academy and essayists had been forced to wait at length for authorization of this publication of essays from which the Academy decided prudently to exclude the most inflammatory passages. Meanwhile, Brissot printed his complete essay on the subject and that of his co-winner the Aix lawyer Bernardi in a volume of his Bibliothèque du Législateur, published in Berlin and Paris in 1782, insisting in print that both essays had been singled out for praise by the Châlons Academy, which had awarded them its laurels. The Paris lawyer Vermeil, using the Academy's Paris bookdealer and publisher, Delalain, got his essay on the same topic into print even more quickly, publishing it, without divulging his authorship, in 1781. By the end of that same year Brissot had arranged for the publication in Berlin of an unexpurgated version of his winning essay on the rights of the falsely accused which was soon selling in Paris as Le Sang innocent vengé, with the claim that it had been 'couronné par l'Académie [...] de Châlons-sur-Marne, le 25 août 1781'. And as if this were not enough, Brissot also included his Châlons essay on the subject along with that by his fellow competitor the avocat du roi Philippon de la Madeleine in another volume of his Bibliothèque du Législateur so that Brissot's essays for the Châlons contests of 1780 and 1781 appeared in two different editions in as many years. Once the Academy learned that there was no question of its being allowed to publish the essays it had received for its competition for 1782 on reforms to France's civil laws and procedure, its competitors in that contest also looked elsewhere for publication. Petion de Villeneuve, procureur du roi in the presidial court at Chartres, sent his manuscript abroad where it was published in London in the year of the contest. However, his fellow competitor L.-J.-B. Bucquet, who had won the Academy's prize for that contest, eventually published his essay in Beauvais in 1785. Although the essay was printed

without his name appearing on the title page, this procureur du roi in the presidial court at Beauvais had waited so long to see in print an essay he had hoped would be published openly and under the Academy's auspices that even though the title page did not give his name, it nevertheless clearly conveyed that the essay had been inspired by the Academy's contest: its printed title began Discours qui a remporté le prix de l'Académie de Chaalons [...].

The artillery officer Pommereul, who competed in the Academy's competition on reform of the corvée, was among the first in that contest to get his essay into print. Publishing his essay in 1781, he retained as title the exact wording of the Châlons contest question; he then went on to contribute the article 'Chemins' for the Encyclopédie methodique. He was joined in print by several of the essayists who had written for the Academy's competitions on educational reform. Although Brissot's essay on popular education remained in manuscript and in government hands, as did that by the winner in the contest, Goyon d'Arzac, Philippon de la Madeleine published his essay on the topic in Lyon in 1783 under the reassuring title Vues patriotiques sur l'éducation du peuple; and the next year his essay for the Academy's contest of 1783 on reforms to education in the collèges was published in London and in Paris, although with no indication as to authorship except that it was 'par l'Auteur de L'Éducation du Peuple'. Two other competitors writing on educational reform published their Châlons essays abroad: the winner of the Academy's prize on female education, the lawyer Jean-François Dumas published his essay in Neuchâtel in 1785 while the peasant smallholder Charles-Robert Gosselin contrived to have his essay on popular education published in Amsterdam that same year. Petion de Villeneuve turned to Geneva for publication of his essay on how to encourage marriage; published in 1785, his book's subtitle again exactly

reproduced the wording of the Châlons Academy's competition for that year.⁴⁹

With 1787 came a relaxation in the government's restrictions on the Academy. In February of that year it was at last awarded a new privilege to publish; but meanwhile two of its prize-winners were already preparing their winning essays for publication independently. Jean Henriquez, a procureur du roi and forestry law specialist who had won the competition of 1786 on how to prevent wood shortages, used Delalain to publish his winning essay, while Mathon de la Cour published in Paris the first of two editions to appear that year of his essay on how to encourage patriotism in a monarchy, indicating on the title page that his essay had 'remporté le prix dans l'Académie de Châlons-sur-Marne, le 25 août 1787'.

But by this time the pace of political events had accelerated. Indeed, the essays submitted for the Academy's competition of 1787 on how to inspire patriotism in a monarchy were drafted during a year in which Louis XVI not only convoked the Assembly of Notables⁵⁰ to approve the radical programme of fiscal and political reform forced on him by the desperate state of Crown finances; he also called for the creation of new provincial assemblies, made up of men drawn from all three estates, who were to work together in the administrative and fiscal tasks of government in the pays d'élection. During this year the nation had also been sought as witness to the rancorous debate, made public by participants from both

⁴⁹ The reader is referred to the section 'Printed Primary Sources' in the Bibliography for the full titles and publishing details of the works mentioned in this and the preceding paragraph.

⁵⁰ The Academy's former director, who had retired from that office when he was made mayor of Châlons, was one of those called in December 1786 to take his place at Versailles among the realm's notables; however, at 77 M. de Parvillez was too old and infirm for the journey and offered his excuses. By midsummer 1787 he was dead. Poinson, Histoire générale, III, 506. See AD Marne I J 195 - proceedings for 19 July 1787.

sides, between Louis's Controllers General, first Calonne and then Loménie de Brienne, and members first of the Assembly of Notables and then of the Paris Parlement and the Cour des aides, who throughout the spring and summer of 1787 steadfastly refused to give their consent to the radical fiscal and political reforms intended by the Crown to increase royal revenues and shift the burden of taxation away from the labouring classes and onto large landowners of all three estates. These political events dramatically altered the urgency of the appeal the Crown was making to the public-spiritedness of those in the country who were to be involved, either in support or in opposition, in the process of fiscal, administrative and political reform; they also rehearsed before a national audience many of the contentious issues which the enlightened public had been invited to consider in the forum provided by the Châlons Academy's essay competitions in the years prior to their censorship by the government.

The essay crowned by the Academy in 1787 openly acknowledged the accelerating pace and strength of political change and privileged opposition to the government during this period. Mathon de la Cour, who had served as premier commis in the Controller General's office many years before, was well aware of the conflicting interests emerging in this period and likened his task in drafting his prize-winning memoir on patriotism under the monarchy for the Academy to that of a portraitist trying to capture on canvas a constantly mobile face. Writing in the third person he commented:

l'auteur s'est trouvé, pendant la durée du concours, dans un embarras assez semblable. Si la question en elle-même n'a pas changé de face, la convocation des notables & l'établissement des assemblées provinciales ont permis de l'envisager sous de nouveaux rapports.⁵¹

⁵¹ Discours sur les meilleurs moyens de faire naître et d'encourager le Patriotisme dans une monarchie [...] (Paris, Cuchet et Gattey, 1787). This essay was republished in Leyden in 1789 by a fellow essayist in the

His winning essay appealed to the public-spiritedness of all Frenchmen but was also openly critical of the rich, the powerful and the privileged for their opposition to reforms which reduced the rest of the nation to poverty and suffering. He also ventured to suggest that the Crown could promote patriotism among the people only if it acted to promote their interests and insisted, like the essayists who had written for the Academy's 1780 competition on the topic, that the new provincial assemblies represented the nation's best hope of introducing reformed fiscal and administrative practice and promoting patriotism among all levels of the population.

Ironically, it was in Châlons that the Crown's first new administrative assembly was established. On 22 June 1787 the Crown decreed that provincial assemblies would be extended to all the pays d'élection, beginning on 23 June with the edict which established the first of these assemblies in Champagne. What had been introduced 'par forme d'essai' earlier and elsewhere under Necker was to be institutionalized throughout all the provinces which lacked provincial estates in order to create a formal and institutional framework which would provide concrete evidence of the Crown's new relationship with a wider citizenry of enlightened and propertied Frenchmen. In Champagne this new administrative framework was inaugurated with the full support and cooperation of the provincial Intendant, the Academy's président né and protector Rouillé d'Orfeuil.⁵²

contest Jean Meerman, Discours présenté à l'Académie de Châlons [...] (S. et J. Luchtman). The passage quoted appears on pp. 34-35 of Meerman's edition of Mathon de la Cour's essay.

⁵² In the preamble to edict creating assemblies in 1787 Louis XVI made direct reference to the 'essais' in Berry and Haute Guyenne: 'Les heureux effets qu'ont produits les administrations provinciales établies par forme d'essai dans les provinces de la Haute Guienne et du Berri ayant rempli les espérances que nous en avons conçues, nous avons cru qu'il était temps d'étendre le même bienfait à toutes les provinces de notre royaume. ... par un meilleur ordre dans les finances et par la plus grande économie dans les

Under royal edict the new assembly was to have responsibility for the division and assessment of direct taxes in the province, for the administration of road building, and the direction of its ateliers de charité; it was also to exercise oversight over all expenditure within the province.⁵³ Rouillé d'Orfeuil, who opened the first meeting of the provincial assembly in Châlons on 17 November 1787, affirmed his support for an administrative body whose creation he had long favoured and was praised by its president for his attentive assistance to the assembly's Commission intermédiaire, which had been invested and operational since August, and for the justice and bienfaisance which had been the hallmark of his own service to the province throughout the 'cours de sa longue administration'.⁵⁴

The Châlons academicians had first sought to use their essay contests to generate support for an administrative assembly in the province in 1778; but they had then seen their Academy silenced in part because of the controversy surrounding the competition it had held on that topic. The

dépenses, nous travaillerons à diminuer la masse des impôts, nous espérons qu'une institution bien combinée en allégera le poids par une exacte repartition'. An edict abolishing the corvée was issued in conjunction with that creating the provincial assemblies. L. de Larvergne, 'Les Assemblées provinciales en France avant 1789', Revue des deux mondes, 34 (1861), p. 54-55 and 663.

⁵³ For the edict creating the provincial assemblies see Isambert, Recueil, XXVIII, 366-74.

⁵⁴ The Intendant responded by assuring the assembly that he would put 'toujours au rang de ses devoirs les plus essentiels celui de seconder, autant qu'il serait en lui, ses vœux et ses projets pour le bien de la province et de solliciter auprès de conseil les secours qu'elle avait droit d'attendre de la bonté du souverain'. Quoted in Poinsignon, Histoire générale de la Champagne, III, 509-15 (p. 513). The Academy's titular member and Vicar-General to the bishop of Châlons, the abbé de Boulogne, delivered the opening discourse in this meeting. Within a very short time (and in part as a result of this address) he would be transferred away from the diocese and then elected ecclesiastical deputy from the parish of St Sulpice to the bailliage assembly of Paris where he served on the commission which drafted its cahier for the Estates General.

Academy therefore welcomed, with d'Orfeuil, the creation of the new assemblies. Indeed, when the Assemblée d'élection first met in Châlons on 28 August 1787, four of the Academy's active members -- the abbé Delacourt and the local Crown officials Soleau, Thomas and Ouriet -- were seated among those who, as members of the new assembly, listened as the Academy's président né, the Châlons bishop Clermont-Tonnerre, praised the Academy for the contribution their learned society had made in preparing the hearts and minds of those now called to the administrative tasks which the Crown had asked the new system of assemblies to perform:

parmi les grands objets d'utilité publique qui doivent fixer son attention, combien n'est-il pas glorieux pour vous d'en avoir préparé plusieurs par l'étendue de vos lumières et la sagesse de vos vues, et surtout par ce zèle vraiment patriotique qui depuis si longtemps est l'âme de vos recherches et la base de vos travaux.⁵⁵

The tasks assigned it by the Crown and announced by the bishop in that meeting sound like a catalogue of the Academy's contest questions, worded, as they had been, to express the Crown's commitment to the needs and concerns of the nation's begging and labouring poor -- the stated motivation to introduce reforms in the administrative and fiscal structures which would make them henceforth 'moins onéreuses aux contribuables [...] moins pénibles à nos communautés' and offer the greatest and most efficient 'soulagement de la classe la plus indigente'.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Procès verbal des séances de l'Assemblée de l'élection de Châlons en champagne 28 août 1787 (Châlons, Seneuze, Imprimeur du Roi).

⁵⁶ 'J'ai déjà eu l'honneur de vous présenter, MM, une esquisse des opérations qui vont être confiées à vos soins. [...] Distribuer avec la plus grande équité la partie des Impôts que chaque Paroisse de notre Élection devra supporter, en adoucir le poids par l'égalité de la répartition, par l'économie des perceptions, par la douceur des recouvrements; proposer les formes les moins onéreuses aux contribuables, leur épargner tous les frais qui ne sont pas indispensables; seconder les vues du Gouvernement dans la confection des grandes routes; les diriger d'après les plans les plus favorables à notre élection, & les exécuter par les moyens les moins pénibles à nos communautés; distribuer les fonds que le Roi destine annuellement au soulagement de la classe la plus indigente de ses sujets; les distribuer, MM, avec cette impartialité qui semble

Although it was with some reluctance that the Academy agreed to relinquish its room in the Châlons town hall every day except the day of its own meeting for the assemblies of the commission intermédiaire, the savants went as a body on 16 November 1787 to offer the Academy's support to the provincial assembly, convinced that, as the bishop had said, they would be allowed to play an active role in 'la révolution qui se prepare'.⁵⁷

In the months that followed the Academy's regular activities were overtaken by the great political events shaking Champagne and the nation. When in July of 1788 Louis XVI asked all savants and 'personnes instruites' to submit 'des mémoires, des renseignements et des éclaircissements' on how the Estates General should be composed, he singled out his royal academies for special praise, soliciting their views in particular in these matters.⁵⁸ Several of the Châlons Academy's members also sat on Châlons's

multiplier les bienfaits, en les plaçant à propos; répartir les fonds que Sa Majesté consacre également chaque année aux ateliers de charité, de manière qu'ils deviennent un soulagement pour les Paroisses, & un travail utile à la Province.' Ibid, p. 21.

⁵⁷ The Châlons bishop concluded his August address to the assembled academicians and public: 'Quel vaste champ, MM, va donc s'offrir à votre zèle. Quel plus digne usage pourriez-vous faire de vos lumières que de les employer à l'utilité de vos compatriotes en multipliant des recherches, des mémoires, et des projets que l'Assemblée accueillera avec [...] empressement [...]. Oui, nous avons droit d'attendre que l'Académie ne restera ni muette ni oisive dans la révolution qui se prepare'. Ibid. For the Academy's relations with the assembly see AD Marne I J 195 - proceedings of 24 and 28 August and 16 and 19 November 1787.

⁵⁸ See on this request François Furet, 'La Monarchie et le règlement électoral de 1789' in The Political Culture of the Old Regime, vol. 2 of K.M. Baker (ed), The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture. The Châlons municipal council replied to this appeal from the Crown by advising Louis XVI to give the Third Estate equal representation in the Estates General without which there would be little hope of obtaining a more equitable distribution of taxes, even, they added ironically, in a century of enlightenment: 'Il s'agit de remédier au desordre des finances, non seulement par l'économie, mais par une répartition des impôts entre les trois ordres proportionnée à la propriété. L'obtiendrons-nous du clergé, si attaché à ses nombreux privilèges? de la noblesse, qui regarde comme une tache la plus légère contribution aux

municipal council -- Thomas and Ouriet as well as Sabbathier and the former hospital administrator Delestrée; and they were active in the debates which preceded the drafting of the municipality's cahier.⁵⁹ And on 4 December 1788 Delestrée, Ouriet and Thomas were among those signing the petition which advised the Crown to allow the Third Estate to enjoy representation equal to that of the First and Second Estates in the coming Estates General.⁶⁰

The Châlons academicians also renewed their efforts to get the reformist opinions which had been generated by the Academy's essay contests before a public now officially called to offer its support in the national movement toward reform. The Academy published a third edition of its collection of essays on the plight of the beggar and printed the best of the essays from its second and third competitions on the reform of the corvée and the creation of a national system of public education, issues which had been made even more topical and urgent as a result of their impending reform in the new assemblies and of the Crown's appeal for the advice and opinions of a larger citizenry through the cahiers.

During this same period many of the Academy's one-time competitors rushed versions of their Châlons essays into print or produced more radical treatises or pamphlets since, following the Crown's appeal of July 1788 for the views of educated Frenchmen, they were free at last to print reformist opinions which had perhaps first taken written form in the essays they had

charges publiques? Nous sommes, il est vrai, dans un siècle des lumières, mais il n'est pas encore venu ce temps où l'équité, quoique reconnue, doit triompher sans effort de l'intérêt personnel.' Poinson, Ibid, II, 522.

⁵⁹ 10 March 1789 Sabbathier and Delestrée formally signed the cahier of the Third Estate of the municipality as 'députés de la société de l'Académie'. Menu, p. 66.

⁶⁰ Édouard de Barthelemy, Histoire de la Ville de Châlons, pp. 249-50.

submitted for the contests in Châlons.⁶¹ Boncerf and Clicquot de Blervache published their essays on the plight of the labouring poor while Bucquet, Bernardi, Brissot and Petion oversaw the printing of uncensored versions of their works on judicial reform⁶² and Groubert de Groubental the whole of his essay on provincial administration along with a damning indictment of the ministers who had prevented publication of this essay along with all the works on administrative and fiscal reform he had produced in the interim. Although LeTrosne was dead, his essay for the Academy on reform of provincial administration was also reissued for the part it could play in public consideration of the issues involved in a more equitable redistribution of France's tax burden.⁶³ Meanwhile, three of

⁶¹ An arrêt of 5 December 1788, registered by the Paris Parlement, gave the first legal sanction to the de facto press freedom which had been operative since early July. See Carla Hesse, Publishing and Cultural Politics in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1810 (Oxford, University of California Press, 1991), p. 20.

⁶² Brissot, who as early as 1782 had sent his Châlons essays abroad to be able to circulate uncensored versions of them, dated his political radicalization to the government's censorship of the Academy's contests. Although Brissot recognized in his Mémoires that the Châlons Academy had 'propos[é] des prix sur des abus qui tenaient aussi près du despotisme' and had 'couronn[é] des discours aussi propres à tirer les esprits de leur léthargie', the suppression of its contests by the government had convinced him that ministers feared essays which contained 'trop de lumières', elaborating 'les principes sur les droits du peuple'. Thus although he conceded that 'on n'avait qu'à louer les bonnes intentions [de] cette Académie', the Châlons society had been powerless before a ministry which controlled its right to publish. 'Le despotisme étouffait toutes les idées généreuses; une lettre du ministre les faisait trembler, je n'en conçus que plus d'horreur pour un gouvernement qui abâtardissait ainsi les esprits'. He turned thereafter from producing 'philosophical' treatises to journalism and pamphlets: 'Il fallait pour préparer une insurrection générale contre les gouvernements absolus, éclairer sans cesse les esprits, non pas par des ouvrages bien raisonnés et volumineux, car le peuple ne les lit pas, mais par de petits écrits, tels que ceux répandus par Voltaire pour détruire la superstition religieuse'. Brissot, Mémoires (1754-1793), ed. Perroud, II, 233-34 and 238.

⁶³ For a summary of the revolutionary impact of LeTrosne's views and a review of the posthumous publication of his Châlons treatise in the Mercure de France for 7 February 1789 see Patrick Kessel, La Nuit du 4 Août

the essayists who had competed in the Academy's competition on patriotism in a monarchy had their essays printed; but perhaps the most important contribution from these essayists was not the publication by Mathon de la Cour of his prize-winning essay on patriotism but rather his Collection des comptes rendus . . . concernant les finances de la France from 1758 to 1789, which drew upon his insider's knowledge as a former premier commis in the Controller General's bureaux and which clearly exposed the structural and administrative changes which needed to be introduced into Crown finances. In all of these publications the Academy's former competitors criticized and condemned, as they had in their Châlons essays, some aspect of France's existing laws and institutions while championing the cause of ordinary people who suffered under the injustice and uncertainties of social and economic life as lived under the prevailing system of institutionalized privilege and inequality.

And yet, of all the Academy's former competitors who published in this period, those most influential in the early months of the revolution seem to have been those who had written for its essay competitions on the indigent and labouring poor, whose plight had been central to the Academy's concerns and activities throughout the whole of its existence. In these publications the humanitarian reformism which had been the hallmark of all the Châlons society's contest questions and publications -- and which in the Châlons essays had contained a consistent appeal to the Crown to act in the interests of the poor and vulnerable producer or would-be wage-earner against the grasping greed of the unjustly privileged -- would emerge to influence a new audience and to assist in bringing the plight of the poor and society's responsibility to them to the top of the agenda of the National Assembly.

Early in 1789 the abbé Montlinot published an Essai sur la mendicité in which he insisted that begging could not be condemned as a crime in a country where a fifth of the nation was so economically vulnerable that it could at any time be forced to beg and where existing legislation operated as a conspiracy of the landed against the landless. Already in January Jean-François Lambert, a late entrant in the Academy's first competition, had produced an open letter addressed to the members of the provincial assemblies and the approaching Estates General and to the public, a Précis de vues générales en faveur de ceux qui n'ont rien pour les mettre sous la sauvegarde de la bienfaisance publique et de la constitution de l'État, in which, citing a passage from the 1780 edition of the Châlons begging competition essay, he called not for bienfaisance but justice for those who lacked land and work. To this end he advocated the creation of a national register which would compile and update information about the needs of the poor and the resources, national and regional, available to meet them. Lambert added weight and authority to his call by indicating that many of the ideas he favoured were already being considered in the bureaux of Chaumont de La Millière, who had himself expressed intense interest in the essays generated by the Châlons contest.⁶⁴ This was just the first of a series of pamphlets produced by this minor functionary who was himself counted among the very poor.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Lambert also recommended that his readers obtain a copy of Montlinot's latest État actuel du dépôt de mendicité de Soissons which had been published with his Essai sur la mendicité. See Bureaucrats and Beggars, p. 220 for Thomas Adams's comments on the links between the two reformers.

⁶⁵ Lambert referred to his own precarious family economy in another pamphlet: 'Depuis seize ans la famille honnête & nombreuse dont je me vois environné est suspendue comme par un fil d'araigné au dessus d'un abyme.' Objet d'une importance capitale, p. 24.

In February Jacques Sellier, who had written on both the beggar and the corvée, published his Observations pour les États généraux in which he condemned the structure of representation in the provincial assemblies and in the Estates General because 'dans tous les cas ce sont toujours les plus riches en propriétés qui dominant'; Sellier called instead for a doubling of the Third Estate with two-thirds of the seats for the Third going not to urban bourgeois but to the peasantry.⁶⁶ And in July he wrote to Necker calling for recognition of what by this time he was designating as 'l'ordre des pauvres, ou des paysans [...] ou des ouvriers' on the grounds that 'la classe du pauvre n'a aucune représentation dans les assemblées générales et particulières de la nation' and that 'c'est ce qui augment toute la misère publique dans ces temps d'égoïsme'.⁶⁷ He would have found support for this notion of a fourth order or estate from Lambert who, some time between publication of his first pamphlet and the first meeting of the Estates General in May, composed and printed a Cahier des pauvres in which he called for many of the reforms outlined in the Châlons essays: an end to fiscal privilege, the poor paid for work formerly performed by corvée, and a national register of the poor with assistance for the children of the desperately poor and for foundlings and state supervision of wages and work, so that the subsistence of the labouring man could be assured. And, insisting like Sellier that the poor were currently without representation, Lambert proposed that he and the abbé Montlinot be made voting members of the new assembly to serve as representatives of the poor.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Sellier had already written to Necker in November of 1788 petitioning him to support the doubling of the Third. See Kessel, La Nuit du 4 Août 1789, p. 20.

⁶⁷ Ibid. This letter was dated 6 July 1789.

⁶⁸ He signed his Cahier des Pauvres 'Lambert, Inspecteur des apprentis des différentes Maisons de l'Hôpital Général, à la Pitié, âgé de 43 ans, domicilié rue Coppeau, la porte cochère en face de la rue de Clef, père de

Meanwhile the disastrous effects of bad harvests and rising urban and rural unemployment had vastly increased the number of desperate poor in France. In August, with Paris and the provinces in turmoil and the Estates General now reconstituted as the National Assembly, Lambert published yet another pamphlet, his Objet d'une importance capitale et décisive soumis à la considération de l'Assemblée nationale, subtitled 'Adresse à l'Assemblée nationale pour sauver le droit du pauvre et pour rétablir le calme et la tranquillité publique'. In this influential brochure, where he again cites the Châlons Academy's essays on begging, Lambert argued that 'liberté' and 'propriété' were meaningless concepts for the very poor whose survival depended on private hand-outs, whereas the conservation of these citizens, whose labour was the true source of the nation's wealth, was crucial. If society were to survive at all, he warned, their needs should be made a right sacred to the constitution.

Ce n'est qu'autant qu'on les mettra par la Constitution sous la protection publique [...] qu'on peut encore sauver la France. Il faut [...] déclarer dans la constitution [...] que la conservation de l'homme laborieux et utile ne soit pas pour la constitution un objet moins sacré que la propriété des riches, que point d'homme laborieux et utile ne puisse être incertain de sa subsistance dans toute l'étendue de l'Empire'.

Insisting that the vulnerability of the poor left them impotent to command or enjoy the rights of the propertied, Lambert argued that the constitution would be sound only in so far as it 'protège efficacement le foible contre l'oppression occulte ou publique du fort' and 'maintient & garantit à tout homme laborieux & utile le droit qu'il a à son existence'.⁶⁹

8 enfants, dont 6 vivans, qui ont tous été nourris par son Épouse, qui Dieu aidant espère bientôt donner un Citoyen de plus à l'État, délibérant à l'Assemblée partielle du district du Tiers-Etat de Saint-Étienne du Mont' - - demonstrating by his nomenclature the qualifications for office he considered worthy of the citizen in France's new Estates-General.

⁶⁹ The quotations are taken from p. 5 of two versions of this pamphlet Objet d'une importance capitale and Au roi et aux états généraux, both of which bear the subtitle 'Pour sauver le Droit du Pauvre', p. 5. Hammering

Lambert's next pamphlet, which he first submitted to the district assembly of Saint-Étienne du Mont in Paris 27 November 1789, was to have a major influence on the National Assembly's work on public assistance and poor relief. In this 'Adresse à l'Assemblée nationale à l'effet d'en obtenir la formation d'un Comité dans son sein pour appliquer d'une manière spéciale à la protection et à la conservation de la classe non-propriétaire les grands principes de justice décrétés dans la Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du Citoyen' he reminded his readers that without such a committee no one would speak in that assembly for 'à peu près les 9/10 de la nation'. The urgency of their needs was a concern Lambert shared with the treasurer for the district of Saint-Étienne du Mont, Boncerf who had himself competed in three of the Châlons Academy's competitions. At almost the same moment that Lambert produced his latest pamphlet Boncerf set forth his views on the subject in a brochure which underlined the necessity of attention to the needs of the poor and unemployed: 'De la nécessité et des moyens d'occuper avantageusement tous les gros ouvriers'. Most of the ideas which Boncerf included in this piece were drawn from material he had assembled to submit to the Châlons society's forthcoming competition on the ways to convert the use of infertile land, and for which he would win its last awarded prize. Expressing in the politicized language of the pamphlet the principles set forth more judiciously in his Châlons essay, Boncerf described the labouring poor who lacked sufficient work to feed themselves and their families as 'les lers créanciers de la Nation'. He then outlined

home the point that society's responsibilities to those without property were as great as those defending their right to liberty and property, Lambert added, 'si une assez grand nombre des représtantans de la Nation jugent qu'une déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen peut être utile & même nécessaire, combien une déclaration claire & positive de protection pour la personne du pauvre, n'est-elle pas plus indispensable & plus urgente dans les circonstances aussi déplorables, aussi critiques, aussi décisives que celles où nous sommes surtout'. Objet d'une importance capitale, pp. 14-15.

the different types of work -- and the categories of land (private, Church and Crown) which could be given over to their use. His pamphlet was seized upon by the municipality of Paris which ordered multiple reprints of it from public funds. And then, both his brochure and Lambert's were forwarded by their district assembly to the National Assembly which on 18 December 1789 received a deputation from the district of Saint-Étienne du Mont petitioning the members of the national body to address themselves to the question of forming a committee within the assembly to establish the needs and rights of the indigent. In less than a week the Assembly approved the formation of the committee to which seven members were to be appointed. This Comité de Mendicité first met on 2 February 1790. Within six weeks Montlinot, Lambert and Boncerf were coopted onto it to serve alongside La Millière whose thinking, like theirs, had been shaped in part by the essay competitions of the Châlons Academy.⁷⁰

Others who had written for the Academy's competitions on legal, administrative, fiscal or educational reform or on subjects advocating structural reforms affecting agriculture and industry, property ownership and the abolition of feudal dues would play a decisive role in the decisions of other committees of the National Assembly and in the events of the revolution; but their story lies outside the scope of the present work. Of significance here is the role that the Châlons Academy was regarded by contemporaries as having played in the formation of ideas which, together with the poverty of the Crown and of the people, led to the

⁷⁰ For detailed information about the formation and work of the committee see Bloch, L'Assistance et l'état, pp. 423-50 and Bloch and Tuetey, Procès verbaux du Comité de mendicité, particularly vii-vii. The committee's minutes note that Lambert was 'pauvre sans ressource', the only secrétaire commis employed by the committee to be so designated. Its honorarium to him was clearly the only way that this father of nine, who earned his living as inspector of apprenticed foundlings in the Paris hospitals, could afford to serve on the committee.

events that would move the monarchy from reform to revolution in 1789 and 1790. In June of 1790 the abbé Delacourt was invited to speak before the departmental assembly in which he praised the Academy for its contribution to the formation of enlightened opinion.

Vous reconnaîtrez facilement, Messieurs, dans cette heureuse révolution, l'effet des lumières de l'esprit humain. Ce sont les veilles des savants qui ont éclairé les peuples: ce sont eux qui ont osé discuter les droits des nations et des rois. L'Académie de votre département, à plusieurs fois, a interrogé sur ces grandes questions les amis de l'humanité. Constamment fidèle à ses vœux, toujours elle a dirigé ses travaux vers l'utilité publique.

But recognition of the Academy's contribution was not limited to Châlons or Champagne, nor did it come only from the lips of its director. As Delacourt noted in his speech to the departmental assembly, 'l'Assemblée nationale elle-même a daigné l'encourager; elle vient de donner à son zèle la récompense la plus flatteuse et la plus honorable'. However, the abbé's parting words to the departmental assembly read like a prescient plea for the Academy's future: 'Toujours, Messieurs, nous chercherons à propager les vérités utiles: c'est en remplissant le but de son institution que l'Académie veut mériter votre estime et votre bienveillance.'⁷¹

It was Delacourt who in the final public meeting of the Châlons Academy provides the most eloquent testimony to the Academy's own assessment of the role it had played in shaping the events that were altering for ever the face of France. Beginning that meeting of 25 August 1790 with a tribute to Malvaux, who had not lived to see the Revolution, Delacourt saluted the Academy for its public essay competitions and Malvaux, in particular, for his work on the Academy's first published

⁷¹ This speech was published in 1790 by L.-B. Bablot, a competitor in two of the Academy's contests, who, though a doctor, in the revolution founded a journal La Caducée, which eventually became L'Observateur du département de la Marne. See La Caducée for 1790, pp. 147-49. Unfortunately Delacourt's reference to the Academy in the National Assembly remains allusive.

résumé. 'Nous savons', he reminds his listeners, 'que l'Assemblée Nationale honore cette précieuse collection de son estime & que aucun autre ouvrage ne lui offre les mêmes secours dans son travail sur la Mendicité'. Beginning with that first great success in its essay competition on the plight of the beggar, the Academy had focused public attention on the issues which were transforming their country. In a series of rhetorical questions which catalogued the Châlons Academy's contest questions, the abbé summarized the contribution it could be seen to have made:

Ne vous a-t-on pas vus interroger les hommes publics sur la meilleure forme d'administrer nos provinces et de régir les impôts N'est-ce pas à vos lumières que nous devons en grande partie ce voeu si générale sur la réforme de nos lois civiles et criminelles? Avant que l'on songeât à former un nouveau plan d'éducation nationale, n'avez-vous pas déjà décerné des couronnes sur cet objet important? N'aviez-vous pas dépeint les malheurs des peuples, n'avez-vous pas cherché les moyens d'améliorer le sort des habitants des campagnes, avant que les droits féodaux et les corvées fussent abolis? N'est-ce pas vous encore qui avez si puissamment réveillé la commisération en faveur des pauvres, et qui avez préparé cet esprit public de bienfaisance qui enfin va faire du soulagement des malheureux une loi sainte et constitutionnelle?

There was nothing, 'aucun problème important ... aucun objet d'utilité publique', to which the Academy had not attempted to bring the light of informed opinion: 'vous avez tout discuté, vous avez voulu porter le flambeau d'une sage philosophie sur tous les grands intérêts des peuples'. But in so doing, the Academy had been hindered by those in government who were opposed to reform. The nation and constitution now open before it gave it reason to hope not only that the needs of the people, whose interests had been its primary focus as an Academy, would receive their due attention, but that the Academy itself would be able to operate freely and without constraint.

Il semble [...] qu'un champ plus libre et plus vaste encore va s'ouvrir aux travaux de l'Académie. La vérité maintenant peut sans crainte élever sa voix salubre; il n'est plus de fers, il n'est plus d'entraves pour le génie: une inquisition souvent odieuse, depuis trop longtemps dégradait les faculté de l'homme [...].

Devoting itself, as it always had, to 'la plus grande cause de l'humanité', the Academy pledged through its director to continue to work for the public good. And yet the abbé Delacourt seems to have realized that the Academy's fight against suppression had not ended. He closed his discourse with an appeal against an unnamed evil which could even now threaten the work of enlightened citizens like the men in Châlons who had long shown themselves committed to the tasks of preparing reforms in the country. His phrases with hindsight must have appeared prophetic to his auditors that day. 'Ce serait un crime en ces jours de crise et d'efforts', he protested, 'de dérober ces lumières à la patrie'.⁷²

During the early days of the Revolution the Châlons society and its essay contests were indeed praised by the National Assembly for the contribution they had made to public recognition of society's obligations to the poor and vulnerable; and yet, as the Revolution turned against the king in whose service the academicians in Châlons had championed the cause of the people, they would once again find themselves denied the possibility of contributing as a body to the work of public service. On the recommendation of the abbé Grégoire the Châlons Academy and all France's other academic societies would be silenced, as bodies whose power derived from the privilege of the Old Regime.⁷³

⁷² AD Marne C 1768 - Discours prononcé à l'ouverture de la séance publique de l'Académie [...] de Chaalons le 25 août mil sept cent quatre vingt dix par M. l'Abbé Delacourt, Directeur (Chaalons, Mercier, 1790).

⁷³ In his speech before the Committee of Public Instruction in August of 1793 Grégoire claimed that 'toutes les sociétés littéraires et autres fussent gangrenées d'une incurable aristocratie'. The suppression of the academies and literary societies was declared law 8 August 1793. See Léon Aucoc, L'Institut de France. Lois, Statuts et Règlements concernant les anciennes académies et l'Institut, de 1635 à 1889 (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1889), cciii-ccviii, and Louis Hauteceur, 'Pourquoi les académies furent-elles supprimées en 1793?', La Revue des deux mondes (15 Décembre 1959), pp. 593-604.

POSTSCRIPT

What conclusions can be drawn from this study of the Châlons Academy and its public essay competitions? Ironically, perhaps the best way to comprehend the thinking that guided the Châlons Academy in deciding what subjects it should, as an enlightened body, devote itself to pursuing and what issues it could constructively present for public discussion we should look for its end, its goal, in its beginning. On the first page of proper text in its first publication, the résumé of the essays it had received for its initial public essay competition, the Academy through its résumé editor the abbé Malvaux wrote of the question it had raised by its competition on mendicity: 'Les causes qui l'ont produite & qui la perpétuent sont trop nombreuses & trop connues, pour être détaillées.' 'Trop connues' -- the Academy began from the premise that everyone acknowledged the reasons why there were so many beggars, that is, it began from the premise that there was consensus. The quantitative content analysis undertaken in chapters four and five of this present study has simply confirmed that, at least in the case of the essayists writing for the Châlons Academy's competitions on the plight of France's begging and labouring poor, the Academy was correct in assuming that there was a consensus of opinion about both the causes of mass penury and the reforms necessary to relieve and reverse it.

But Malvaux does not in this passage from the first published résumé only assert the consensus which in analyzing these contest essays we have discovered to be true and present; he also provides a summary list of the abuses which he asserts were commonly recognized as the factors which were

at work in France condemning the majority in the nation to lives lived in near hopeless penury at or near subsistence levels. And his list, prepared in the fall and spring of 1777-1778, and approved by the Academy as a body for publication, reads like a prescient cahier de doléances but written a full decade before men like the Châlons academicians, and like their contest essayists, would take the lead in drafting the actual cahiers whose writing Louis XVI would authorize in preparation for the meeting of the Estates General. 'Nous dirons seulement', the Châlons Academy wrote that springtime of Louis XVI's reign,

qu'elle [that is, mendicity] est une suite nécessaire des abus de la Loi féodale; de la grande inégalité dans le partage des richesses; du poids énorme des impôts dans les Campagnes; de cette multitude d'Offices privilégiés qui déchargent le riche de la taille pour en gréver le pauvre, & plus encore de l'arbitraire des tailles; de la perception trop compliquée des impositions qui en absorbe une partie, foule la misère & l'industrie pour entretenir le faste & l'orgueil; des vexations fiscales, source souterraine de rapine & de ruine; de ces frais exorbitants qui ne permettent à l'humble Citoyen l'entrée des Temples de la Justice, qu'au péril même de sa fortune; de ces professions lucratives qui, pour quelques hommes fortunés font des milliers de pauvres; de la mauvaise éducation du peuple, de la facilité qu'ont les Mendians de trouver de quoi vivre, sans travailler; de la fainéantise & du libertinage, enfin d'un luxe dévorant.¹

This statement, surprising in tone, reads rather more like a pre-revolutionary pamphlet than what one might expect from the pens of royal academicians. In it we discover in outline all of the issues which the Academy would pose for public discussion in the years that the government, perhaps unwittingly, allowed it to use its contests as an open, public forum for the consideration of radical reforms, contests which we have considered in chapter six of the present study. In Malvaux's list we recognize an early version of the Academy's competition questions on the burden of the corvée (1778-1779) and on the inequities and inefficiency of the prevailing fiscal system, the abuses in its assessment, the injustices

¹ Les Moyens de détruire la mendicité en France, pp. 1-2.

and waste in its administration (1780); we see the subject of its contest question on reforms to France's judicial system and of the laws and legal institutions which granted access to 'justice' and to office to those with the wealth to buy that privilege and which permitted the wealthy few to reduce the many to penury (1780-1782); we see, too, direct reference to society's failure to provide ordinary people with education and training (the subject of the Academy's competitions of 1779 and 1781), as well as an indictment of the existing system of charitable relief -- alms without work (1776-1777).

Finally, one sees in this brief statement a reference to the 'luxu dévorant' coupled with 'fainéantise' and 'libertinage' -- the first vice clearly attributed to those of wealth, the second two descriptive of all those -- unworthy beggars or idle rich -- who sought to live off society without contributing to it. Here, too, appears a theme which underlies most of the essays received by the Châlons Academy throughout the reign of Louis XVI: these academicians and those who wrote for them had already rejected the society of orders based on privilege. As the Academy's motto indicated and as those -- active working professionals, local notables, crown officials -- who made up the majority of its essay competitors insisted when they prepared their criticism of the abuses of the existing order, the individual's place in society, his claim upon its benefits, his right to its honours was one that should be earned by his utility to the social whole, by his contribution to its economy and to the general public weal. 'A l'Utilité' was the maxim guiding the Châlons Academy's activities and in choosing this as its devise the Academy signalled to its competitors its allignment with the emerging vision of social order which made not birth nor great fortune but economic and social contribution the prime characteristics qualifying a man for membership in the social and political

economy. Stated plainly, it seems that the main articulation in society for the Châlons Academy and for its essay competitors was no longer social but economic. Citizenship as they conceived it was defined by one's economic and social contribution. This strongly economic reconceptualization of society and of the context in which reforms were to be considered again points us to revolution and the ideology which would emerge fully in the decades which followed these contests.

And in the Academy's summary statement in this first résumé of the institutionalized and customary abuses of society under the old order we recognize a further revolutionary element. All the abuses detailed here were linked; the problems facing ordinary Frenchmen could not be resolved by piecemeal changes, by essays in reform. Although the Academy would pose serially contests which considered in detail the abuses recognized as such by all those writing for its first contest, its summary statement of them in this first résumé indicates that the Châlons Academy's public agenda of reform was so thoroughgoing, so resolute, that if instituted together the reforms would revolutionize the life of the nation.

That the royal academy at Châlons felt confident in posing such questions for public discussion was predicated on its faith in the monarchy and its firm conviction that the time for the introduction of these reforms had come. Again in a statement contained in this first résumé we read of the Academy's confidence that the Crown, through committed reforming ministers and officials who had captured the attention of enlightened opinion, was itself now committed to the implementation and institutionalization of reforms to France's laws, to her fiscal system, to the recognition of society's duty to its vulnerable members and of its obligation to the majority who fueled its economy.

Quel moment [...] plus propre pour l'exécution d'un projet digne d'immortaliser à la fois la Nation, le Prince & le Siècle? Quelle

circonstance plus favorable que celle où un jeune Roi & une jeune Reine, les délices de leur Peuple, ne sont occupés qu'à faire des heureux?²

And then,

S'il fut jamais une époque favorable pour donner des loix aux peuples, cette époque intéressante est arrivée. [...] Jamais les intérêts de l'homme ne furent aussi solennellement agités. Des génies courageux & sublimes ont osé porter devant les Rois la cause sacrée des Nations. Enfin les lumières ont appelé la bienfaisance à côté des trônes, les peuples ne sont plus de vils troupeaux aux yeux des Gouvenemens. Il semble qu'une fermentation générale agit les Nations de l'Europe.³

Referring again to the reforms which had recently been essayed by the Crown in an effort to alter the form and perception of taxes, to reduce abuses in the judicial system, to reimpose government controls on trade, and in so doing reduce the vexations visited by the rich and privileged on the vulnerable, the Academy and its essayists in this résumé look forward to the coming day in which Louis XVI would establish a permanent programme of reform -- described here as 'inévitabile' -- which would put into place laws, institutions and practices which would serve the needs of all his subjects and honour the service of the people. Reformist optimism was unbounded: 'Aujourd'hui que la France est gouvernée par un Roi bienfaisant & sage, à quelles espérances ne peut-elle pas se livrer?'⁴

This time the Academy's question remained unanswered. The optimism which characterized its first contest as well as its determined efforts throughout its history to get the views of its competing public before the throne marked its beginning and its end. Acting as a channel through which a multitude of essays in reform were to reach their monarch, the Châlons academicians faithfully worked to serve Louis XVI. And although it is

² Ibid, vi.

³ Ibid, pp. 429-40.

⁴ Ibid.

impossible to determine with any exactitude the influence that their essay contests exerted on the formation of the revolutionary public opinion which the Crown might have used to overcome the opposition of the privileged and establish the reforms which the Academy believed were desired by a majority of thinking Frenchmen, we find among those who wrote repeatedly for the essay contests of this Academy men who would contribute their views and vision directly and indirectly to the revolutionary bodies who undertook to respond to the grievances outlined in the cahiers, outlined, too, in the manuscripts submitted to the Châlons society. Among the Academy's essayists were Boncerf, Lambert, Montlinot who, as we have seen, would serve on the revolutionary Comité de Mendicité and set out a first formal definition of the modern state's obligations to the begging and labouring poor; Boncerf, three-times a competitor in the contests of the Châlons Academy, would also serve on the Comité d'Agriculture et de Commerce and would be recognized, too, as a major influence on the thinking of those who were entrusted with establishing the means by which feudal dues were to be redeemed; LeCruelx, who wrote for the Academy's competition on the corvée, would end his days as head of France's national system of Ponts et chaussées. Philippon de la Madeleine and Guyton de Morveau, who had written for the Academy on education, would be honoured for their contribution to the work of the Committee on Public instruction and Guyton would help to found what would become the École polytechnique. Bernardi, who had written for the Academy on judicial reform, was among those from whom Napoleon would choose the editors of France's new law code; he would end his days as division chief in the ministry of justice. The role that Petion, as mayor of revolutionary Paris, and Brissot, as revolutionary journalist and leader of the Girondins, would play in the early years of the Revolution needs no telling. It is clearly impossible to establish

with any certainty the precise influence that the writing of their Châlons competition essays had on the formation of the political thinking of these prominent actors on the revolutionary stage. And yet the opportunity to present detailed arguments in favour of significant structural reforms to their society through the agency of a royal academy early in Louis XVI's reign had provided these men with a significant occasion to enter into public political discourse. And even when the forum provided by the Academy was denied them, the response of government would add new lessons to their political education for, as we have seen in the case of Brissot, the Crown's suppression of the Academy's contest could turn those who wrote to support reforms under enlightened monarchy away from it to the harsher tasks of pamphleteer and critic of the regime.

In the first public meeting which, in August of 1787, the Academy was allowed to hold without the threat of government censorship hanging over its proceedings, the Academy's director defined for his auditors the Academy's definition of patriotism. It was, he wrote

un amour fort et puissant du corps national dont nous sommes membres, joints à la ferme volonté de contribuer au bien général de ce corps, de procurer l'avantage de tous les individus qui le composent et de serrer de plus en plus les liens de l'union qui doit regner entre tous les hommes qui vivent sous le même empire.⁵

The solidarity of Frenchmen to Frenchmen was a sentiment the Châlons academicians had long promoted. So, too, the principle that each individual was to contribute to the public good, as well, as the notion that the ties that bound men one to another should carry equal responsibility for all. And unquestioned as the only form of government which could prevail in France had been the academicians' faith in the enlightened rule of France's Bourbon kings. But in August of 1787 the Academy felt it necessary to assert that government by monarchy was the

⁵ AD Marne I J 210, No. 69.

best among the alternative forms of government which could rule within a country. And this was, the Academy now asserted, because monarchy tempered by law, indeed by laws which would set out society's obligations to its individual members and which would impose limits upon private greed and harmonize the divisions latent in any society, would provide Frenchmen with the surest hope of public order and happiness. Patriotism as here described had begun to sound as if it were loyalty to the one authority with sufficient power to overcome the opposition of vested interests, to a monarchy willing to have its own actions defined by written, constitutional law. Monarchy was here recognized as the best of the political choices, as the form of government best able to encourage patriotism, which was the subject of the Academy's prize essay competition whose winner was announced in this same meeting. 'Le gouvernement monarchique paroît le plus propre à faire naître le patriotisme dans les coeurs: l'autorité réunie dans les mains d'un seul monarque et tempérée par de sages loix previent les divisions et les jalousies'.⁶ The Châlons Academy's revolutionary education was nearing completion. And until those in authority in the revolutionary government once again silenced the Academy's reformist voice, its members would to the end remain devoted servants of the public's interest, devoted servants of the Crown.

⁶ Ibid.

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I J 38 - Concours de 1777. Mémoires accompagnés des rapports faits à leur sujet par la commission, par: Viot, de Reims (Marne), le Père André, fr Madrid (Spain); Gidoïn, d'Estampes (Essonne); Dubois d'Escordal, de Saint-Loup (Ardennes); Bertin, de Valenciennes (Nord); J.F. Senger, de Bordeaux (Gironde); Grignon, de Bayard (Haute-Marne); Descombes, de La Marck (Allemagne); Mordas, de Vic Trois Évêchés (Alpes de Haute Provence); Poussot, de Paris; Pons, de Montmedy (Meuse); Loth, de Saint-Petersbourg; Couver, de Rebetz près de Meaux (Seine-et-Marne); Puricelli, de Besançon (Doubs); Rozé, de Paris; de Louvemont, fr Minnecourt (Marne); Blanchard, de Tourteron (Ardennes) et six non identifiés.

I J 39 - Concours de 1777. Mémoires accompagnés des rapports faits à leur sujet par la commission, par: Decan, de Meaux (Seine-et-Marne); Du Verger, de Bezinghem (Pas-de-Calais); Jauge [Sauge], de Saint Foy-sur-Dordogne (Dordogne); Mme Eglain, de Paris; de La Joise Prious, de Paris; Rabigot de la Croix, de Versailles (Seine-et-Oise); B. Miger, de Milly en Gatinois (Loiret); de Crequy, de Riceys (Aube); Le Brun, de Vendoeuvre (Aube); Hornus, de Saint-Dizier (Haute-Marne); Mil, de Pezenas (Hérault); Deval, d'Ussel (Corrèze); Malherbes, de Falaise (Calvados); Van Beughem, de Courtray (Belgique); Lescure, de Sarlat (Dordogne); Noel, de Reims; H. Khiyt, de Lillo près d'Anvers (Belgique); Andreas, de Venice; Vareilles, de Bordeaux (Gironde); Panckoucke, de Paris; Manget, de Saint-Memmie (Marne); de Chateauvieux,

de Saint-Cloud (Seine-et-Oise); Dubois, de Fontainebleau (Seine-et-Marne); Criquillion, de Tournay (Belgique); Beaucourt de Noortvelde, de Bruges (Belgique) et un non identifiés.

I J 40 - Concours de 1777. Mémoires accompagnés des rapports faits à leur sujet par la commission, par: Gueniot, de Tonnerre (Yonne); Dortu, de Châlons-sur-Marne; Chauchard, de Bussières les Nonnes (Haute Vienne); Van der Borch, de Bruxelles; Bourdier de Beauregard, de Pau (Basses-Pyrénées); Felix Til-Leo, de Bapaume (Pas de Calais); Le Tonnellier, de Autrèches (Oise); De la Balme, de Senlis (Oise); Trumeau de Lierne, de Issoudon (Indre); de Nas de Tourris, de Marseilles (Bouches-du-Rhône); Boillet, de Val de la Haye proche Rouen (Seine-Inférieure); Descaure, de Mezières (Somme); de Serres de Mesplès, de Montpellier (Hérault); Le Clerc, de Rouen (Seine-Inférieure); Montlinot, de Soissons (Aisne); D'Auxiron, de Besançon (Doubs); Dom Pierre Paul, de Paris; Sabbathier, de Châlons-sur-Marne et trois non identifiés.

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I J 42 - Concours de 1777. Mémoires accompagnés des rapports faits à leur sujet par la commission, par: Monfrabeuf, de Petites Armoises (Ardennes); Jervus; Felix de Motès, (Italie); Piovanni, de Venise; Blasius, de Brihuega (Espagne); Ignatium Antonium, de Cassano (Italie); Tripièr de Losé (Mayenne); Le Blanc, de Vitry-le-François (Marne); Lambin de Saint Felix [Lottin], de Paris; Romans de Coppier, de Rouen (Seine-Inférieure); Clouet, de Verdun (Meuse); Paillard, de Dorne (Nièvre); de Gavre (Pas de Calais); de Louvemont, de Minnecourt (Marne); Larroque, de Bayonne (Pyrénées-Atlantiques) et cinq non identifiés et un rapport fait par l'Académie d'un sixième.

I J 43 - Concours de 1778. Trouver les moyens les moins onéreux à l'État et au peuple de construire et d'entretenir les grands chemins. Mémoires accompagnés des rapports faits à leur sujet par la commission, par: Descombes, de Silesia; Angélique Téréze de la Croix; de Vareilles, de Bordeaux (Gironde); Duplessis, Haguenau (Bas-Rhin); abbé Richel, d'Aubagne (Bouches du Rhône); Borot Descotais, de Vezelay (Yonne); de Sarbourg, de La Flèche (Sarthe); Roch[es], de Genève; Gibaudière, de Rennes (Ille-et-Vilaine); Dom Benoît Le Maire, de Saint-Jean-d'Angely (Charente-Inférieure); Babaud de Logerie, de Confolens (Charentes); Descaure, de Mezière (Somme); de Ghendt, de Paris; Nozières d'Abzac (Gironde); Marchais de Migneaux, de Paris; Biver, d'Arc-en-Barrois (Haute Marne); de Pommereul, de Fougères (Ille-et-Vilaine); [Madru], d'Amert (Puy-de-Dôme); Demiege (Saône-et-Loire); Bertin; Le Vallois [extraits] de Reims (Marne); Pinsart de la Cour, d'Allemagne; Miger, de Milly en Gatinois (Essonne); Poterlet, de Châlons (Marne); De la Hausse,

de Montzeville (Meuse); Grosjean, de Remiremont (Vosges); Trumeau de Lierne, de Bourges (Indre); Caillette, de Sainte Menehould (Marne) et huit non identifiés.

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I J 45 - Concours de 1779. I. Trouver les moyens les moins onéreux [...] (suite): Mémoire établi par récapitulation de tous les mémoires que les candidats ont présentés au concours.

I J 46 - Concours de 1779. I. Trouver les moyens les moins onéreux [...]. Mémoires accompagnés des rapports faits à leur sujet par la commission, par: Caulet des Chalette, de Tronq près Saint-Dizier (Haute-Marne); Bedouet, de Tours (Indre et Loire); Michel, de Châlons (Marne); Franquin, d'Amblonville (Oise); Richel, d'Aubagne (Bouches-du Rhone); Miger, de Milly (Essonne); Lecreulx, de Nancy (Meurthe-et-Moselle); Girau[1]t Maisonneuve, de Versailles (Yvelines); Herbert de Hauteclair, de Paris; Duperon, de Paris; Le Jolivet, de Dijon (Côte-d'Or); Maillar[d], de Vic Fezensac (Gers); Michel Barthélemy, de Vertus (Marne); Le Vicomte de Champagne; de Plaigne, de Montluçon (Allier); Biver, d'Arc-en-Barrois (Haute Marne); Hourcastreme, d'Oléron (Pyrénées-Atlantiques); Guichellet, de Pont-de-Vaux (Saone-et-Loire); Piroux, de Nancy (Meurthe-et-Moselle); Sollicoffre, de Marseille (Bouches du Rhone); Marchais de Migneaux, de Paris; Poterlet, de Châlons (Marne); Morel, de Châlons (Marne); Monestie 'plusieurs curés de Narbonne' (Aude); Demiège, de Macon (Saone-et-Loire); Lefebvre, de Caen (Calvados); Guillaume, de Naives (Meuse); de Burnay, de Clermont-Ferrand (Puy-de-Dome) et neuf non identifiés.

I J 47 - Concours de 1780. Généralités et Correspondance. I. Quels seraient les moyens les plus avantageux pour administrer la Champagne, d'après les vues du roi, le génie, la situation, les productions de cette province? II. Quelles pourraient être en France les loix pénales les moins sévères et cependant les plus efficaces pour contenir et réprimer le crime par des châtimens prompts et exemplaires en ménageant l'honneur et la liberté des citoyens. Mémoires accompagnés des rapports faits à leur sujet par la commission, par: Chaye, de Paris; de Payan, d'Aubenas en Vivarais (Ardeche); Bernardi, de Monieux (Vaucluse); Grosjean, de Remiremont (Vosges); Vermeil, de Paris; Delisle Demoncel, de Courcelles (Meuse); Buisson de Champbois, de Paris; Manget, de St Memmie en Marne (Marne); Guyon, de Châlons-sur-Saone (Saone-et-Loire); Sauze, de Paris; Fontaine, d'Annecy (Haute-Savoie); Lasserre, de Paris et neuf non identifiés.

I J 48 - Concours de 1781. Généralités. I. Quel serait le meilleur plan d'éducation pour le peuple. Rapport général. Correspondance.

I J 49 - Concours de 1782. Généralités. I. Lorsque la société civile ayant accusé un de ses membres par l'organe du ministère public, succombe dans cette accusation, quels seraient les moyens les plus praticables et les moins dispendieux de procurer au citoyen reconnu innocent le dédommagement qui lui est dû de droit naturel? II. Quels seraient les moyens de rendre la justice en France avec le plus de célérité et le moins de frais possibles. Mémoires accompagnés des

rapports faits à leur sujet par la commission, par: Goyon d'Arzac, de Mezin près Condom par Nérac (Lot-et-Garonne); Gez, de Toulouse (Haute-Garonne); Traullé, d'Abbeville (Somme); Jousse, d'Orléans (Loiret); Feret, d'Amiens (Somme); Bucquet, de Beauvais (Oise); Falour Du Vergier, de Paris et deux non identifié. III. Sur les moyens d'améliorer en France la condition des laboureurs, des journaliers vivant à la campagne, celle de leurs femmes et de leurs enfants. Mémoires accompagnés des rapports faits à leur sujet par la commission, par Dubois (Sénégal et Bretagne); Fabre, de St. Roche en Villeneuve (Bouches-du-Rhône); Nausser, de Quinson (Basses-Alpes); Mourier, de Genève; Millot, de Fulvy (Yonne); Pauvert, de Rochemenier (Maine-et-Loire); Muguet, de Trélon (Nord); Trioson, de Chaise Dieu (Hérault); Bouguet, de Pleneuf (Côtes-du-Nord); Féquant, d'Effincourt (Haute-Marne); Gandon, de Chatillon-sur-Marne; Galliot, de Saint-Jean-sur-Tourbe; Morand, de St Sulpice (Savoie); Groult, de Cherbourg (Manche); Philippoteaux, de Selles en Berry (Loir-et-Cher); Bizet, d'Amiens (Somme); Cauchois, de Rouen (Seine-Inférieure); St Belin, de Clermont (Oise); Collin, de Saintes (Charente-Maritime); Aleton de Marigne (Maine-et-Loire) et huit non identifiés.

I J 50 - Concours de 1783. Généralités. I. Sur les moyens d'améliorer en France la condition des laboureurs, des journaliers [...]. Mémoire par Nausser, de Quinson (Alpes-de-Haute Provence) et Delettre, de Berni-Rivière (Aisne) et un non identifié. II. Sur les moyens de perfectionner l'éducation des femmes. Cinq rapport faits par la commission.

I J 51 - Concours de 1784. Généralités. I. Sur les moyens d'encourager et de perfectionner l'éducation des collèges en France. Généralités et Correspondance. Rapport générale des commissaires nommés par l'Académie. Mémoires accompagnés des rapports faits à leur sujet par Garron de La Bevière, de Bourg (Ain); Lebroussard, de Gand (Belgium); Le Brigant, de Tréquier (Côtes-du-Nord); Descomte, de Toul (Meurthe-et-Moselle), Philippon de la Madeleine, de Dole (Jura) et dix-neuf non identifiés.

I J 52 - Concours de 1785. I. Sur les moyens d'animer le commerce de la province de Champagne et particulièrement de la ville de Châlons. Mémoires par Blake (d'Angleterre) et [Ruffer] II. Quels seraient les moyens d'encourager et de faciliter les mariages en France, conciliés avec le respect dû à la religion et aux moeurs publiques. Mémoires par Dorfeuil de Narbonne (Aude) et trois non identifiés et neuf rapports faits par la commission.

I J 53 - Concours de 1786. Généralités. I. Sur les moyens de prévenir en France et particulièrement dans la province la disette des bois, tant de charpente civile, militaire et navale que pour le charronage, chauffage et autres. Mémoires accompagnés des rapports faits à leur sujet par la commission, par Percheron de la Galezière, de Paris; Fabien, du Havre (Seine-Inférieure), Po[t]in, de Château-Villain; Huichelbos van Liender, de Rotterdam; Challan, de Meulan-sur-Seine (Yvelines); [Manhand]; Jacquemart, de Reims (Marne); Payart, de Vitry-en-Champagne et rapports faits par la commission au sujet d'un mémoire par Moriste, d'Evreux (Eure) et rapports sur cinq autres mémoires.

I J 54 - Concours de 1788. Généralités.

I J 55 - Concours de 1790. I. Quels sont les moyens de mettre en culture la plus avantageuse les terrains incultes, secs et arides de la Champagne, en y employant quelque espèce que ce soit de végétaux, arbrisseau ou arbustes qui puissent être analogues au sol des différentes contrées de cette province? Un mémoire non identifiés. II. Moyens qu'on peut employer pour prévenir et punir les banqueroutes. Manuscript by Mard of Lyon (Rhône).

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I J 196 - Registre des procès-verbaux des séances de la Société d'agriculture, commerce, sciences et arts du département de la Marne An VI - 1807.

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8129 - 8130 - Recueil sur la mendicité fait sur l'ordre de Turgot

11389 - 'Traité des États' et notes diverses sur l'administration provinciale, en particulier sur celle que des Arrêts du Conseil établiront en 1778 et 1779 dans le Berry et la Dauphiné

11420 - Mémoire sur les moyens d'améliorer en France la condition des laboureurs, des journaliers, des hommes de peine, vivants dans les campagnes et celle de leurs femmes et de leurs enfants. Qui a remporté le prix au jugement de l'Académie de Châlons-sur-Marne en 1783. Par un Savoyard.

12846 - Choderlos de Laclos. Discours sur la question proposée par

l'Académie de Châlons-sur-Marne, 'Quels seroient les meilleurs moyens de perfectionner l'éducation des femmes?'

- 22048 - Police d'État. 3 Discours dont le gouvernement avait empêché l'impression. ('3 mémoires couronnés à l'Académie de Châlons-sur-Marne et dont la publication a été empêchée par le gouvernement à cause de leur sujet)

(folio 51-70) Essais de Laopédie ou Mémoire adressé à l'Académie de Châlons-sur-Marne en réponse à cette question; quel seroit le meilleur plan d'éducation pour le peuple?

fonds des nouvelles acquisitions françaises

- 1989 - Essai sur les pauvres et la mendicité, XVIII^e siècle

E. Bibliothèque Municipale de Châlons-sur-Marne

- MS 451 - Mémoire sur cette question proposée par l'Académie des sciences, arts et belles lettres de Châlons-sur-Marne dans son assemblée publique du 25 août 1787: Quels sont les causes les plus ordinaires de l'émigration des habitants de la campagne vers les grandes villes et quelles seroient les moyens les plus propres à les retenir dans leurs foyers? (Mémoire No. 9)
- MS 674 - Rapport par Poterlet à la Société, de la nécessité de conserver l'école de dessin et les cours de physique et de chimie expérimentale existant à Châlons (22 décembre 1804)
- MS 815 - Dialogue sur la mort de M. de Choiseul de Beaupré, évêque de Châlons; état de l'Académie des sciences, arts et belles-lettres de Châlons-sur-Marne, année 1786 [imprimé]. Chaalons, Seneuze.
- MS 863 - Dissertation sur le sujet [...] quelles sont les causes les plus ordinaires de l'émigration des habitants des campagnes vers les grandes villes, et quels seraient les moyens les plus propres à les retenir dans leurs foyers. 14 mai 1781 (Mémoire No. 1)
- MS 864 - Mémoire tendant à répondre aux demandes de MM de l'Académie des sciences de Châlons [...] sur les moyens d'empêcher l'émigration des habitants des campagnes vers la grande ville, et encore sur ceux à employer pour cultiver les terres incultes, sèches et arides. 1789
- MS 865 - J. Gabriel de Sudan, étudiant au Collège Godran de Dijon. Recherches sur les causes ordinaires de l'émigration des habitants de la campagne vers les villes, 1789 (No. 7)
- MS 866 - Fauconpret, avocat. Quelles sont les causes les plus ordinaires de l'émigration des habitants de la campagne vers les grandes villes et quelles seraient les moyens à les retenir

dans leurs foyers, 1789 (Mémoire No. 5)

- MS 867 - Discours sur les causes les plus ordinaires de l'émigration des habitants de la campagne ... et sur les moyens les plus propres à les retenir dans leurs foyers, 1789 (Mémoire No. 13)
- MS 868 - Observations sur les moyens qui paraissent pouvoir suppléer à la dépopulation des campagnes et multiplier les ressources de l'Etat. A Crespy-en-Valois, 8 decembre 1784. Lu à l'Académie le 15 decembre 1784.
- MS 1239 Lettres patentes portant érection de la Société littéraire de Châlons en Académie des sciences, arts et belles-lettres (Versailles, août 1775); arrêt du Parlement de Paris enregistrant les lettres patentes d'août 1775 (18 mars 1776); règlement de l'Académie (1776); état de la Société littéraire de Châlons depuis son établissement et particulièrement depuis le 14 novembre 1753, époque de ses assemblées régulières, avec indication des différentes ouvrages composés par chacun de ses membres (8 mars 1776); privilège accordé à l'Académie des sciences, arts et belles-lettres de Châlons de faire imprimer par l'imprimeur de son choix tous les ouvrages qu'elle composera (Versailles 14 février 1787)
- MS 1274 Réflexions sur les labours de la Haute-Champagne; mémoire lu le 27 février 1765 à la Société littéraire de Châlons
- MS 1275 Delisle, de Reims. Mémoire sur les moyens d'améliorer en France la condition des laboureurs, des journaliers, des hommes de peine vivant dans les campagnes et d'améliorer le commerce en Champagne, particulièrement dans la ville de Châlons. 1782 (Mémoire No. 39)
- MS 1276 Mémoire sur la nécessité de procurer de l'ouvrage aux habitants de la maigre Champagne; lu en la séance publique de la Société littéraire de Châlons-en-Champagne, par M. Billet de la Pagerie, membre de ladite Société
- MS 1277 L'Académie des sciences, arts et belles-lettres de Châlons demande les moyens d'animer le commerce dans la province de Champagne et particulièrement dans la ville de Châlons. Réponse: Sillebit commercium tandiu silebit agricultura. 1786 (Mémoire No. 6)
- MS 1278 Projet de tablettes encyclopédiques de la Champagne, lu à l'Assemblée du 19 mai 1778, de l'Académie des sciences par Grignon, maître de forges à Bayard
- MS 1279 Mémoire sur les moyens d'animer le commerce de Champagne et en particulier dans la ville de Châlons. La liberté est la mère du commerce et l'émulation en est la nourrice. 1783 (Mémoire No. 2)
- MS 1280 Inventaire générale des titres, mémoires, manuscrits ouvrages imprimés et des différents effets de l'Académie des sciences, arts et belles-lettres de Châlons, depuis son établissement (12

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F. Bibliothèque Municipale de Reims

MS supplement 32 - Le Génie du commerce est le pivot du monde

MS 1551 Recueil de pièces sur la Champagne

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